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ABSTRACT

This edition of "Loblolly," a periodical published by Texas high school students, commemorates the 50th anniversary of World War II. The volume features remembrances of the War by veterans of Panola County, Texas. In addition to transcriptions of conversations with veterans, reproductions of photographs--some from the war period, some from more recent times--are included. Teachers and students interested in teaching and learning about World War II from the perspective of those who fought in it might well find this document useful. (DB)

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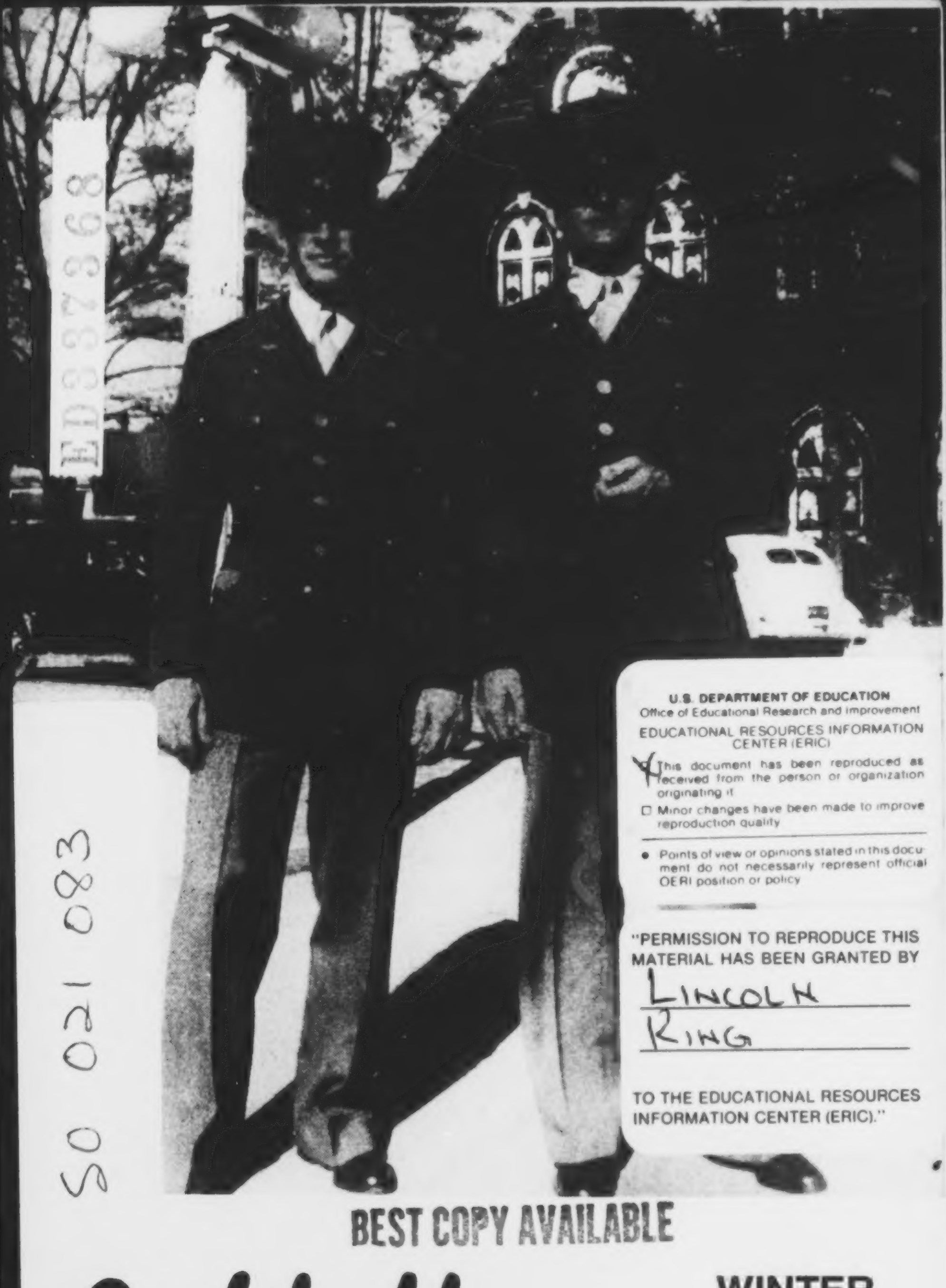

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Loblolly

WINTER
1991
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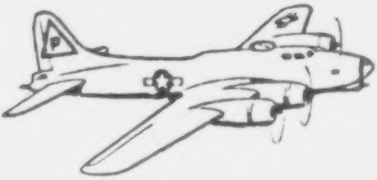

This issue of Loblolly is published
in memory of
George E. "Buddy" Underwood
of Carthage, Texas whoe died as a
pilot of a B-17 Flying Fortress
over Europe in 1944.

Cover Photo: George Berry West and George "Buddy" Underwood - 1942 as Aviation Cadets and long time friends.

Volume XVIII No. 1 Winter 1991

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2. The Loblolly Staff Involved - Mark Johnson, Danny Weems, Susie Britton, Melissa Hughey, Amy Singleton, Melody Mims, Kena Baxley, Jeniffer Johnson, Ashley Wilkerson, Jenny Bell, Teresa Hilburn, and Anthony Stallone.

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Cover Photo: George Berry West and George "Buddy" Underwood - 1942 as Aviation Cadets and long time friends.

Introduction

This issue of Loblolly is our first effort to remember the 50th anniversary of World War II. Many from Panola County and East Texas went off to war in strange and new places in the world. Most came back and took up their interrupted lives. And some like George Underwood did not return and we wanted them to be remembered too.

We decided to visit some of our friends and neighbors who had memories to share of those war years after our first visit with George Berry West. These remembrances are part of our history and need to be preserved. We will be back with other interviews of World War II in future issues of the Loblolly. We thank all those who took the time to share what they remembered of their days as young men and women in those perilous times.

George West

George West participated in the Second World War by flying in the U.S. 8th Air Force, which bombed Germany. The U.S. Air Force was unique in its use of strategic air power by precision daylight bombing, which had never been done before. Daylight bombing was a far more accurate method of striking the German war machine. This type of bombing was highly dangerous, but it weakened Germany considerably. The success of the 8th Air force was due in great part to people like George West and his friend, George Underwood, who grew up together in Carthage, Texas. They went off to war together to fight in the skies over Germany. But George Underwood died on his 13th mission as a bomber pilot. George West came home in 1945. He hasn't been in a plane again for the past 45 years.

George West - 1990

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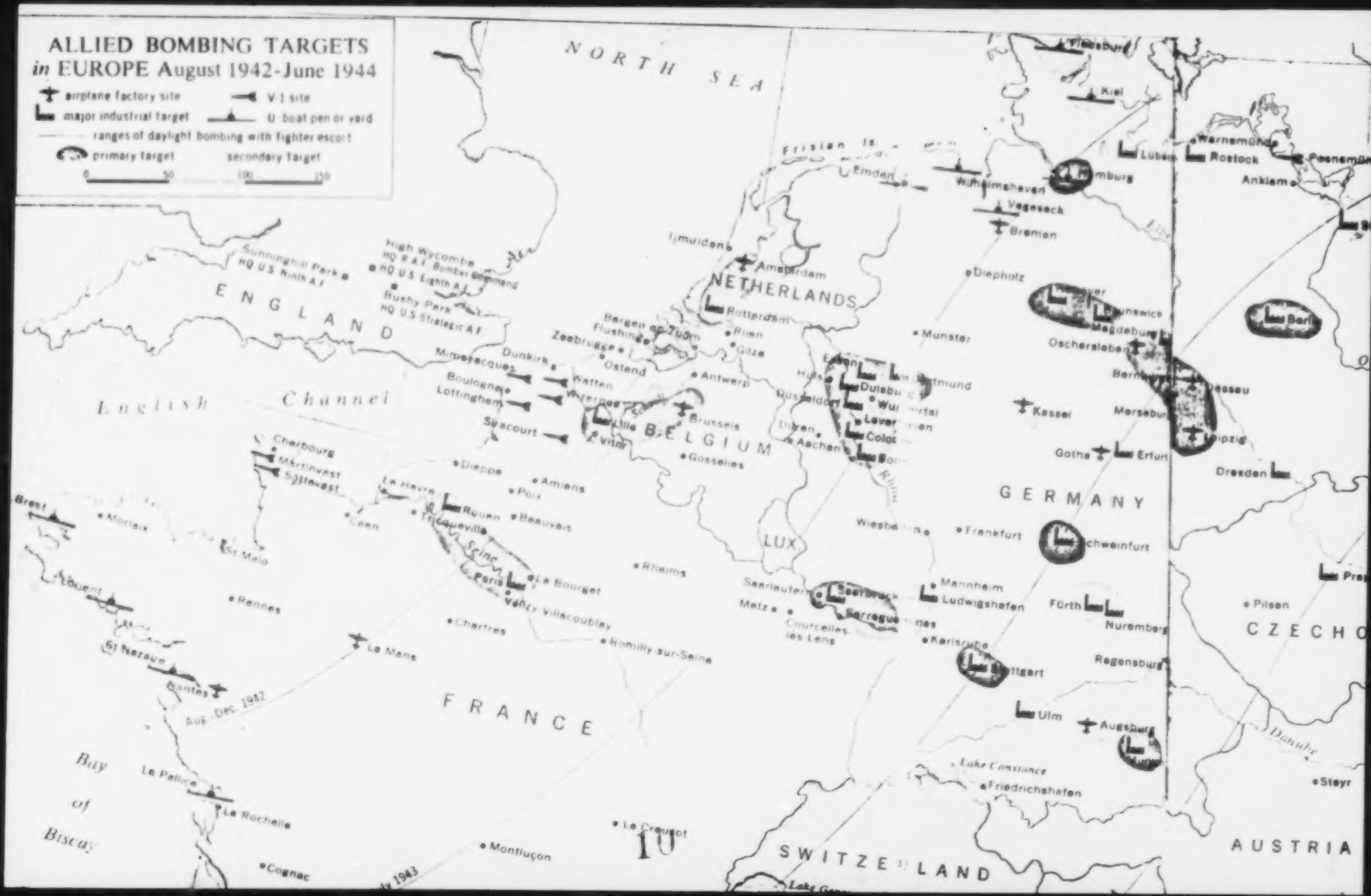
I felt that this would be interesting because of myself being named George and my friend's name being George, and that we grew up together. We both eventually married two girls from Carthage named Louise. We started school together in the second grade in Carthage and remained together all the way through the Air Corps. The only difference was that I came back and he didn't.

In the beginning of World War II you had to be a college graduate to enter the Air Corps. There were so many people getting killed that they would let you into the Air Corps without any college degree. George "Buddy" Underwood, Clifford Smith, M.J. Tarbor, and myself all went to Barksdale to take the examination. We all passed and entered the Air Corp, about April of 1942. We were then given a furlough and didn't have to report until July.

I remember it so well, we left Carthage on July 30, 1942, to go to Barksdale. At that time Shreveport only had two clothing stores, Stines and the OPO, "One Price Only," and all they had were suits. I was so poor that the suit I bought at the OPO, for fifteen dollars, was the only clothes I had until I was issued an uniform in Nashville, Tennessee. I wore that suit all the time. I even marched around in rain and shine in that suit, it went through it all. Later on that suit drew up to about my ankles. While we were in Nashville they classified us, and we stayed there for about two weeks. We were on K.P. (Kitchen Patrol) and one night we washed a stack of pans that were, it seemed, twenty feet high. I had never seen that many dishes to wash in my life. From there I was transferred to Montgomery, Alabama. We stayed there for about nine weeks. At Alabama there was at least 500 cadets. Here we were so busy that it seemed we hardly had time to eat. From Alabama we transferred to Union City, Tennessee and that is where we finally saw our first airplanes. These planes were what we called the PT-17's. I had never flown airplane or anything else in my life. I could barely fly a kite. When I got into that thing I didn't know what I'd gotten myself into.

On my first flight, I got lost. I flew around and didn't know where I was, being in Tennessee and not in Texas. I'd fly along a railroad station and see a sign, but I didn't know where it was. I didn't know anything about Tennessee. The plane had a gas gauge and it kept going down, so I picked me out a big field and landed there. At that time if you landed and didn't call it in they would wash you out. So, I called in and they sent a couple of planes to pick me up and bring me in. I think that I'm the only one who never got lost again because I carried a map and I always knew where I was. We went from there to Greenville, Mississippi for basic training. We left Greenville on February 28, 1942, and went to Vescent, Indiana. From there we went to European August. It was a year from when we started and I was flying an airplane. It was remarkable that we could go through that fast.

We were the first replacements and we thought that we were really something because Clark Gable had been over there. We soon found out that he had flown only five missions and went home. At that time you had to fly twenty - five



ALLIED BOMBING TARGETS *in* EUROPE August 1942-June 1944

airplane factory site
V-1 site
major industrial target
U-boat pen or yard
ranges of daylight bombing with fighter escort
primary target
secondary target
0
50
100
150
NORTH SEA
Frisian Is.
Emden
Wilhelmshaven
Vegesack
Bremen
Flensburg
Kiel
Hamburg
Lübeck
Warnemünde
Rostock
Peenemünde
Anklam
Ijmuiden
Amsterdam
NETHERLANDS
Rotterdam
Diepholz
Hannover
Brunswick
Berlin
Magdeburg
Oschersleben
Bernburg
Dessau
Merseburg
Leipzig
Sunninghill Park
HQ U.S. Ninth A.F.
High Wycombe
HQ R.A.F. Bomber Command
HQ U.S. Eighth A.F.
Bushy Park
HQ U.S. Strategic A.F.
ENGLAND
Bergen op Zoom
Flushing
Zeebrugge
Rijen
Gilze
Munster
Dunkirk
Ostend
Mimoyecques
Watten
Antwerp
Boulogne
Wizernes
Lottinghem
Siracourt
Lille
Vitry
BELGIUM
Brussels
Gosselies
Essen
Hüls
Dortmund
Duisburg
Düsseldorf
Wuppertal
Leverkusen
Cologne
Bonn
Düren
Aachen
Rhine
Kassel
Gotha
Erfurt
Dresden
English Channel
Cherbourg
Martinvast
Sottevast
Dieppe
Amiens
Poix
Le Havre
Rouen
Beauvais
Caen
Triqueville
Brest
Morlaix
St. Malo
Seine
Paris
Le Bourget
Villacoublay
Vélizy
Rheims
Lorient
Rennes
Chartres
Romilly-sur-Seine
Le Mans
St. Nazaire
Nantes
Aug.-Dec. 1942
FRANCE
Bay of Biscay
La Pallice
La Rochelle
Cognac
Montluçon
Le Creusot
July 1943
LUX.
Wiesbaden
Frankfurt
GERMANY
Schweinfurt
Saarlautern
Saarbrücken
Sarreguemines
Metz
Courcelles-les-Lens
Mannheim
Ludwigshafen
Fürth
Nuremberg
Karlsruhe
Stuttgart
Regensburg
Ulm
Augsburg
Munich
Danube
Lake Constance
Friedrichshafen
SWITZERLAND
Lake Geneva
Pilsen
Prague
CZECHO
AUSTRIA
Steyr

missions before they sent you home. But when I got over there nobody had ever done twenty - five missions and that really shook me up. We replaced everybody except one crew.

They figured out how many missions you could do according to the percentage you could do without getting killed. They figured that you could do twenty-four so they added one more and if you did twenty - five you got to go home. As the missions got better your odds went up so they raised the number of missions. I had about 16 missions when they raised it to thirty. They made me do twenty-eight my crew was the only one that ever finished all twenty - eight missions without being wounded.

The American 8th Air Force was flying over Europe in daylight raids. The English (Royal Air Force) was flying from England at night on their raids. Our commander was General Doolittle and he said we were going to Berlin, and better yet we were going to call them and tell them we were coming. He did just that and we went that day. At that time it was the longest raid that we had ever pulled off, with about eight hundred bombers, and it was the largest air battle that had ever been flown over Europe up to then. I received the Distinguished Flying Cross on this mission to Berlin. The reason I received DFC for this mission was because we had only lost about one fourth of our oxygen before we got over there. We had to reposition everyone in the plane so they'd get oxygen. This had to be our greatest air battle of history. We lost sixty - nine B-17's on the raid, our most losses ever on a single raid.

George West receiving Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) - March 18, 1944. He ended up with two DFC's and four Air Medals.

The worst mission that I was on was to Brunswick, Germany. It was the worst because the enemy fighters would fly in the contrails and shoot the hell out of us, because we couldn't see them coming up behind us and taking evasive action.

The flak was really bad also. When we came back from Brunswick we had to scrape my plane because it had one hundred eighty - seven holes in it, but no one was wounded.

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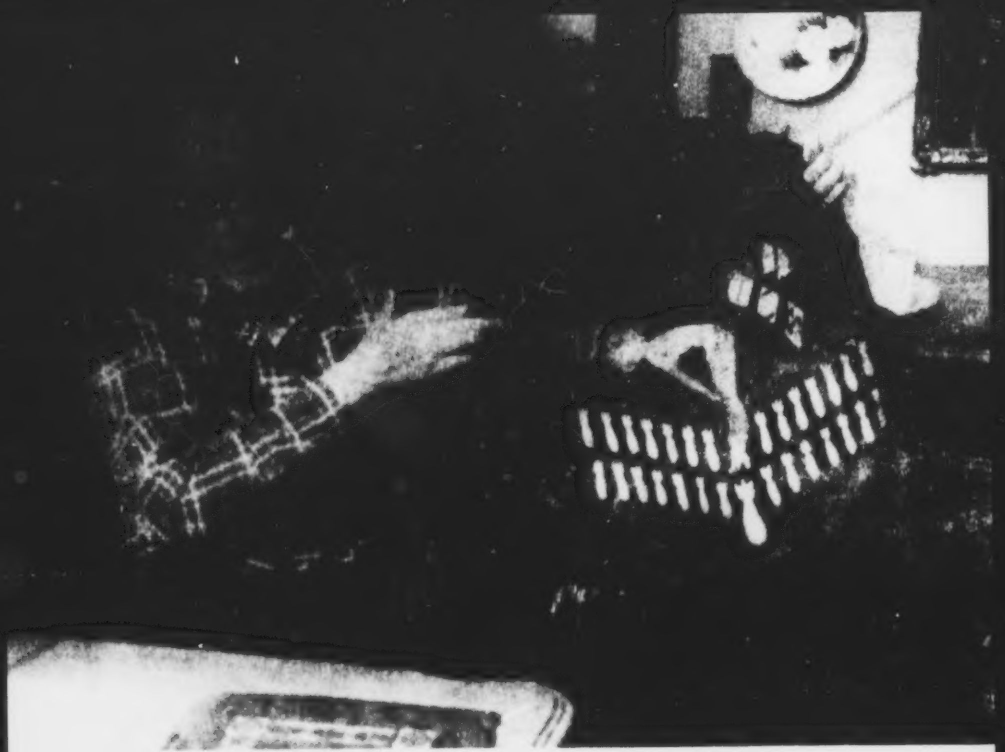
During the mission to Kiel, the plane above me came down to let his bombs out and the bombardier fell out. We found out later that he had passed out right before he fell out of his plane. But he had come to before he hit the ground and pulled his parachute. He was then a P.O.W. (Prisoner of War). After the first Schweinfurt mission we almost stopped bombing because we lost so many people. I wasn't on the first one, but I was on the ones in February 24 and April 27, which were the ones where we destroyed the ball bearing factory. The reason we had so many problems was because the Germans were really protecting the thing. It was so far that they cut your fuel so you could carry extra bombs. You would run out of fuel if you didn't conserve it to the last drop. It was hard to conserve that much fuel because you had to fly in formation all the way there and back. You had to stay in formation, because if you didn't the Germans would cut you out. They would shoot the dickens out of you if you got out by yourself. That was your main problem.

My base alone went on three hundred and sixteen missions. We dropped twenty-two thousand, four hundred and fifteen tons of bombs on Europe. We lost one hundred and fifty - nine planes, one thousand, five hundred and seventy - nine men, and destroyed one hundred and sixty-five enemy aircraft, and probably destroyed thirty - four more, and we damaged one hundred and sixteen enemy aircraft.

My childhood friend, George Underwood, was on his 13th mission when he died. He went down in the English



George West and his flight jacket showing his twenty - eight missions and the name of his plane, "West End" named for his wife, Louise West.

Channel and washed ashore later. I don't know what really happened other than the fact that he was trying to get back. I always thought that maybe he ran out of gas and he tried to ditch. What it was, was that if you had to ditch you knew you had better do it before you got to the English coast, because the English had the coast line mined. I think what really happened was that he was trying so hard to get back that when he ran out of fuel he was so close to the coast line

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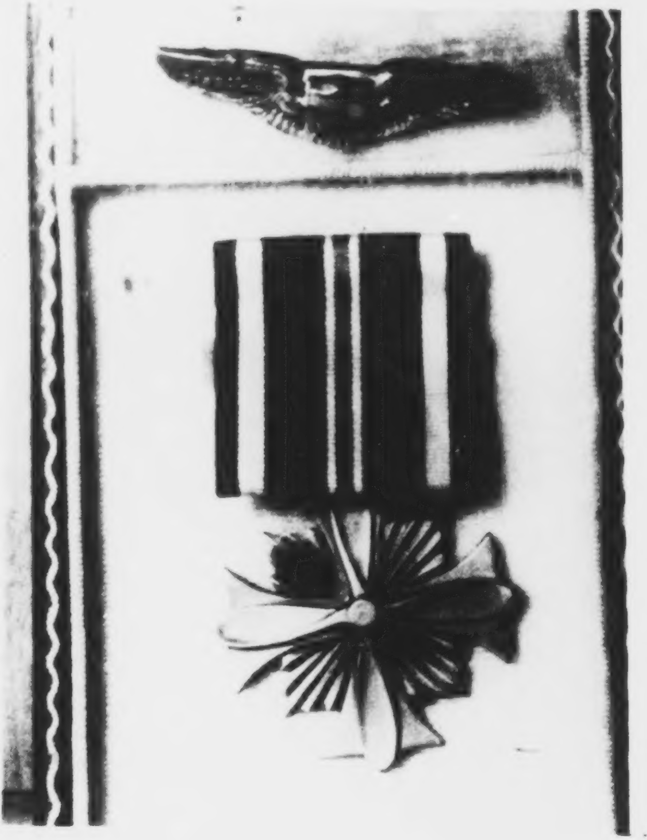
The first was Everett Woodard who was a waist gunner. He won the Silver Star on the Brunswick raid I was on. And J.W. "Jake" Woodard was a navigator, and was on the Berlin raid of March 6, 1944.



George West's Distinguished Flying Cross and Pilot's Wings.

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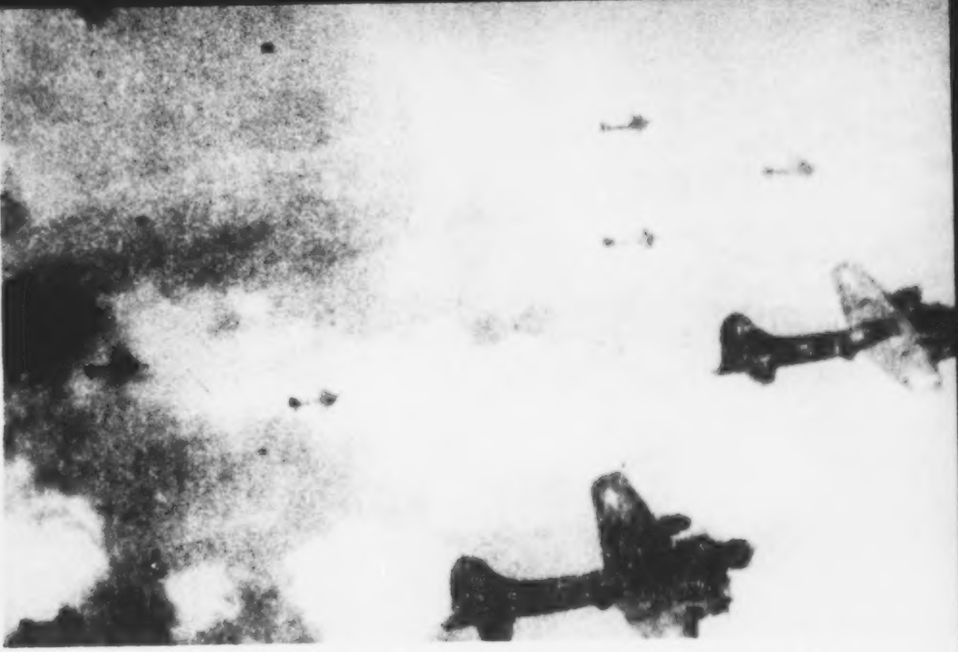
The Story of a Mission

The night before we were to go on a mission the orders would come in from the headquarters in London. We were alerted that night but we didn't know our specific orders. The next morning, usually around four o'clock, the staff would come around and wake us up in the barracks. It was really cold that early. We would have about 15 minutes to get up and get some clothes on. Then we would get on a truck that would haul us about a mile to the mess hall. Mission mornings were the only times when we had fresh eggs for breakfast.

After we ate, usually about five o'clock, we were loaded back on the truck and carried to a briefing room. All of the pilots would go into one room. The navigators, bombardiers, and gunners all had a separate briefing room. In the briefing rooms they would pull a big curtain out from over a map of Europe. On this map it would have a red string going into the target and a green string showing the way out from the target. After they briefed us and told us how to go in, where the enemy aircraft were concentrated, and whether we were going to have to fly up through an overcast, we would pick up our flying equipment in a duffel bag. Then we would go to our planes.

It would usually be about a mile out in the field. The ground crew was all at the plane and they would have it serviced. At that time we would check with the ground crew about the plane to see if there was anything wrong with the it that they knew about. Usually they



"On the way" - George West's eighteenth mission - raid on Berlin on March 6, 1944 - his B - 17 is at the bottom of the photo.

had worked on it all night to get it in shape. At this time the crew would be loading their guns while the pilot would go around and check everything he could find on the outside of the plane. Then he would check each crew member to be sure each one had his proper equipment. Then we would all get in the plane with our equipment. Next we would check over the intercom or radio equipment inside the plane. We didn't use any outside radio at all because the Germans would pick it up if we did. At this time we would start our engines. We would have to taxi out because the planes were lined up on the strips of runways.

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They flew against Berlin on March 6, 1944 - George West is second from right on second row - five crews from his three hundred eighty - fourth Bomb Group took part in the raid.

We would take off one right after the other, every thirty seconds until we were all in the air. If we were flying up over an overcast, what the pilot would do then, was when he took off he would maybe climb five hundred feet a minute at airspeed one hundred fifty miles an hour. He might maintain that heading for five minutes then he would do a one hundred eighty degree turn and come back

Louise West in 1944 - she inspired the name from George West's B - 17.

because there would be another airfield over there that was taking off. All of this time we wouldn't be able to see anything while we were in that cloud. Sometimes some of them might fuel up and run together and when they did that was it for them. Most of the time up around nine or ten thousand feet it was cloudy. After we got above these clouds it was clear and pretty.

When we got up above the clouds we would then begin to get in formation. Most of the time when we reached the English coast we would be in a group. The average mission would usually last about eight to ten hours. We would have to fly formation for that length of time, with our wing tips overlapping each other. The pilots would have to sit there and watch the other planes constantly for eight hours. Normally the lead plane would have a bomb sight in it and what we called the deputy lead which was the number two plane would have a bomb sight. They were the only two planes that had bomb sights. These planes would get where they called the Initial Point (I.P.), maybe thirty miles from the center of Berlin, where we were trying to bomb. We would fly up to that I.P. then we would turn and go straight into the target that we were going to bomb. Everyone would open their bombbay doors and get ready. The lead plane would be sighting on the target. As soon as he dropped his bombs everyone else would drop theirs. Nobody sighted except that one guy. If he got shot down then the deputy lead would sight. I only remember a lead plane getting shot down once. I was deputy lead and my bombardier got to sight that time.

They had a big coast defense gun at that place we were trying to knock out. The flak from the anti - aircraft guns was real bad while we were over the targets. The German aircraft wouldn't bother us while we were in the flak because they didn't want to get in it. But as soon as we got out from over the target then here they would come. If we were flying real close formation then they didn't like to mess with us. They

Crew of the "West End" - Back row left to right: Graeb (tail gunner), died in auto accident after war; Crippen (top turret gunner/ engineer), (earlier a member of the B - 17 crew which flew General MacArthur out of the Philippines in 1942), location unknown; Skergo (ball turret gunner), lives in Blue Field, West Virginia; Charles Anderson (radio operator), lives near Chicago; Ray (waist gunner), lives near Chicago; Figley (waist gunner), a successful Pennsylvanian grocer. Front row left to right: DeWitt (navigator), location unknown; George West (pilot), Carthage, Texas; Donald Fount (co - pilot), died of natural causes; Tony Craddio (bombardier), from the Bronx.

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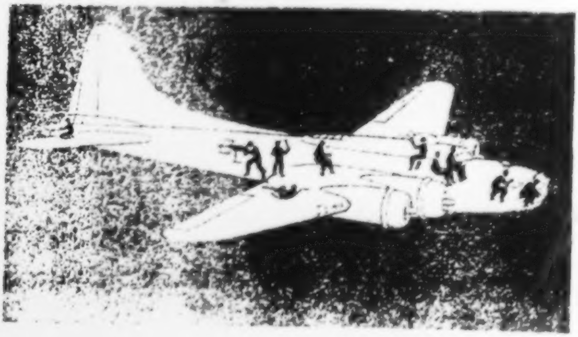
would find one with an engine knocked out and they would fly all the way back to England.

Usually we got back about three or four o'clock in the afternoon. The planes who had someone wounded would land first. After we had all landed there would be a truck there to pick us up and take us back to what they called the interrogation room. Each crew member would set down to a big shot of scotch. The intelligence officer would go over the mission with us. They wanted to know how many planes were shot down, or how many we saw go down. They wanted to know about the enemy air fighters and how bad the flak was over the target. They would go over how good we were in formation. They always took photographs of the bomb sight. They could tell if one's bombs were out away from the others, then they could tell that he was not flying good formation.

After that we would usually go back to the officers club or the mess hall and get something to eat because we had not eaten since breakfast. We usually carried a couple of Milky Ways or Mars Bars along on the mission. So if one of us bailed out he would have something to eat while he was over there. We usually ate them on the way back. After mess hall, or when we were finished eating, we would usually go back to the officers club and set there and pass out the bull about the missions, talk to all of the rest of the guys, and buy up all of the scotch we could get. They didn't have a lot of scotch. We were usually so keyed up by then that we stayed up until at least midnight before going to the barracks. The barracks were usually so cold that we couldn't hardly stand them. The only heat we had in the barracks was a small stove. It was fired with coke. It was hard to build a fire with that coke, you would freeze to death. It was liable to take an hour to get the fire started. After I was over there awhile I rigged me up some electric heaters. Usually the MPs would come by and if we had any electric heaters they would take them down.



THE FORTRESS (B-17F)

Length	74 ft. 9 in.
Wing Span	103 ft. 10 in.
Height (Vertical Fin)	19 ft.
Weight (Gross)	(approx.) 60,000 lbs.
Bomb Load (Average)	5000 lbs.
Speed (Cruising)	211 m.p.h.
Horsepower	4800
Armament (.50 cal. Machine Guns)	12

Jack Howland

Q - When and where were you born?

A - I was born in Casper, Wyoming in 1920.

Q - Would you tell us about your family and your schooling?

A - Oh, you know, in my generation we were kids of the Depression, and we suffered pretty much about the same as everybody. The Depression took us back East. My dad was working for an oil company back there. Everything went to pot! He had to find a new job, but at least he worked. I lived and graduated from high school in Port Chester, New York. I never really liked the East very much. When I got out of high school I made tracks for the West, and went to college in Colorado Springs while majoring in geology. And then the war came along. I had already gone three years, and finished my last year after the war.

Q - When did you go into the service in World War II?

A - Oh, that was in June of 1942.

Q - After the war, what kind of work did you do, and what have you been doing since then?

A - Well, I finished in Colorado Springs and graduated as a geologist with a minor in engineering science. And then I went to work for Gulf Oil in South America and worked there 23 and a half years. I asked for a transfer back to the United States. And they said, "Yeah, we've got a job for you." Up there they were going to put me in mines. Of course I didn't know anything about mining at all. Well, I had a record for being quite innovative so I was given the job of land reclamation where we mined. Land reclamation was brand new.

In 1970 I was transferred back to Pittsburg Midway Coal Mining Company, a Gulf subsidiary up in Kansas. It was really a pleasant job because I got to design a lot of tools that we used. These were designed especially to put land back together after strip mining, and this was the first attempt. One of the tools had a forty foot angle blade, and it moved about 7,500 cubic yards of dirt per hour. Then the second was the largest bulldozer ever built. The blade was 60 feet long. Two 525 horsepower tractors drove it, but it was too big.Then we built another one that was forty feet wide. I worked there for about seven years, and had a total of about 30 years with them and was eligible for early retirement.

In 1977, I guess it was, my wife and I traveled around for a little bit. About that time the contractor I had

A large formation of Boeing B - 17 "Flying Fortresses" of the 381st Bomb Group, en route to bomb enemy installations somewhere in Europe, flies over a blanket of fleecy clouds.

worked with said, "Jake, I've got some equipment up here. Can't you do something with it? Put it to work for me." I came down here to Carthage and talked to David Reedy, who was a manager here at this mine north of town. And they were in pretty bad shape at that time. This was about 1978 or 1979. They had just learned how to mine. They were doing a pretty good job mining but they

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Nazi attempt to cover the target with smoke screens as Boenig B - 17 "Flying Fortresses" of the 381st Bomb Group approach for thier bomb run over the target - Europe.

weren't doing a very good job putting it back together again. So he said, "Well, bring your stuff down here and we'll try it out to see if it works." So they put us to work out there. They also had some locals out of Longview, and they gave us each a parcel of land to put together. We each had 85 acres. I knew how much it was costing us, and I knew what equipment they had and approximately how much it was costing them. By the time we

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finished up our work I figured it was coating them upwards ten thousand dollars an acre to put that land back together again, and we were doing it for about three thousand dollars. So we stayed and they left. I worked at that for another eight years. Then I retired to play on the organ, write a little bit, and to travel.

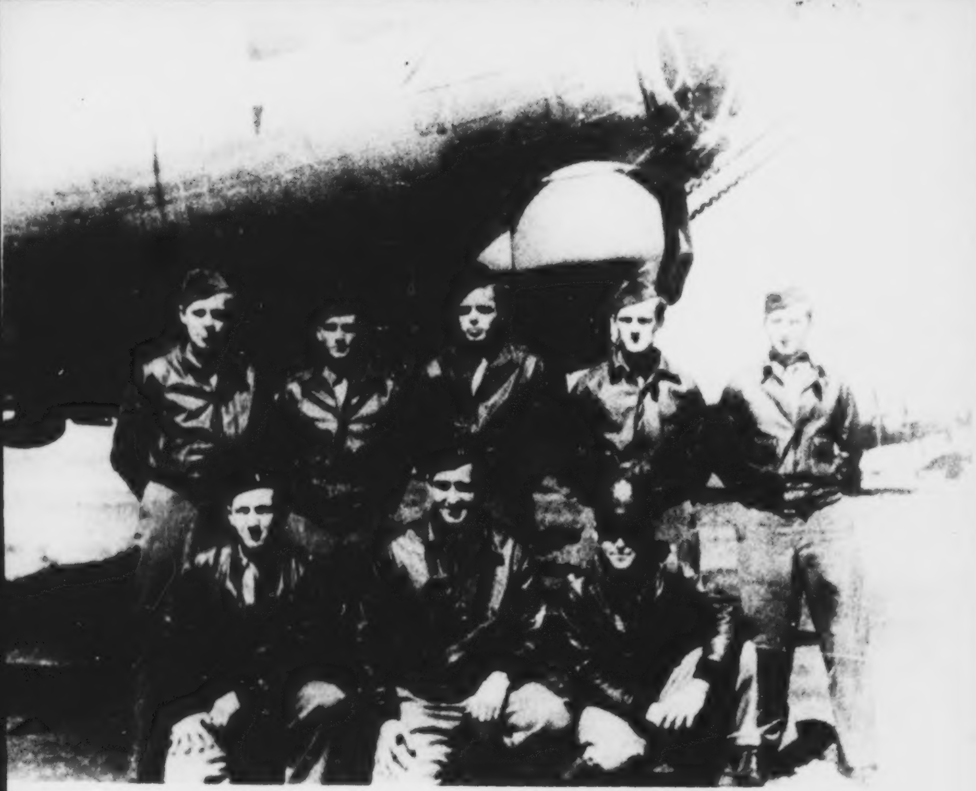
Q - When did you and your wife get married?

A - We were married in 1949, four years after the war.

Q - Why did you go into the Air Corps?

A - Oh, I don't know. I had a pilot's license. They had what they call a Civilian Pilot Training Corps back before the war, and I liked to fly so I chose the Air Corps. It sure seemed to beat being a doughboy or a foot slogger, or something like that. When I enlisted, I was a half inch too short to be a pilot in the Army Air Corps. So they said, "Do you want to be a glider pilot? You only have to be five feet tall to be a glider pilot."

So I went to New York and took the test. You had to take the same test to be a glider pilot that you did for aviation cadet. They must have added a bunch of junk, but I got through. And I was sitting there and this Lt. O'Connor came over. I'll never forget him. He said, "Have you ever thought about being a pilot in the Air Corps?" I said, "Yeah, but I'm a half inch short to be a pilot." He said, "Well, we can get you a waver on that. You got 123 on your test here, and the nearest guy to you got 91." So I said, "You go ahead and get me that waver, and I'll be glad to go ahead and sign up for the Air Corps." Of course I



Front (L to R) John W. Howland, Navigator, James L. Tyson Pilot, William Doherty, Copilot

Rear (L to R) Richard C. Jensen, Eng. & TTG, Arnold C. Farmer, TG; Robert H. Miller, RWG; Charles Churchill, LWG; Henry N. White, Radio Operator

Pathfinder Team

324th Squadron
91st Bomb Group

1st Bombardment Wing
1st Division

Bassingbourne, England May 1944

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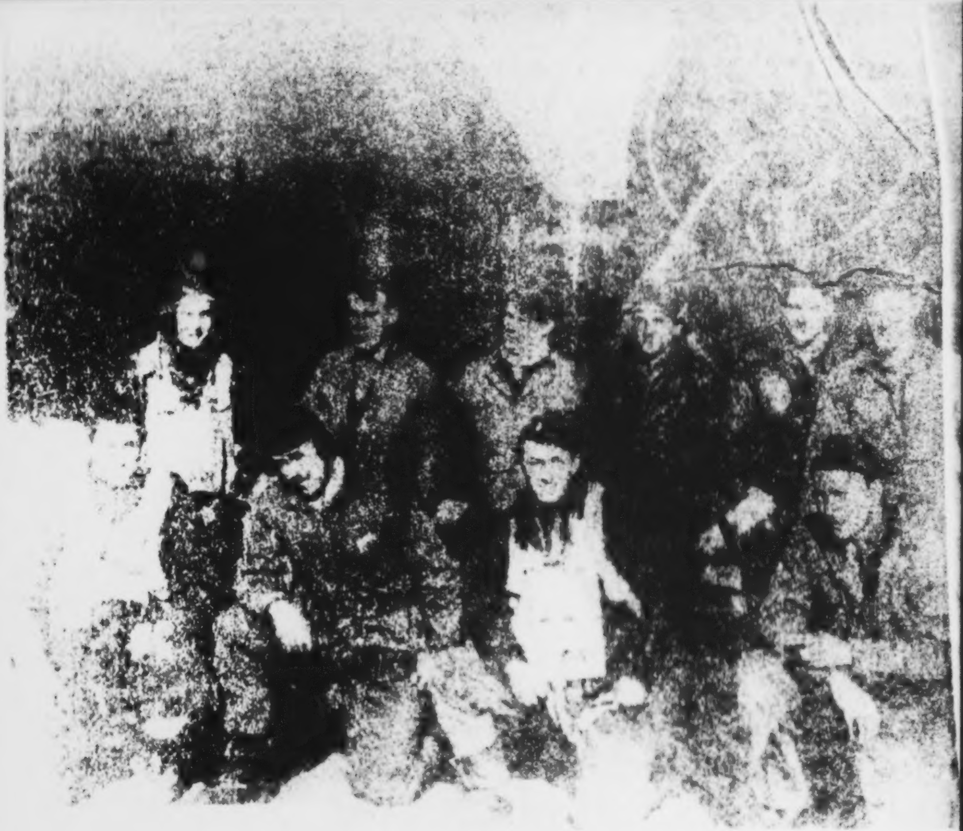

had drops in my eyes [illegible] anything and sig[illegible] months later they [illegible] I went down to [illegible] same tent [illegible] "Well, you're [illegible] blood." I said, [illegible] ever." He said, [illegible] never seen that [illegible]

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B - 17 COMBAT TEAM
8th U.S. ARMY AIR FORCE

Front (L to R) Frank T. Palenik, Bombardier; John W. Howland, Navigator; William T. Doherty, Copilot; James L. Tyson, Pilot
Rear (L to R) Charles Churchill, LWG; Robert H. Miller, RWG; Arnold C. Farmer, TG; Edgar M. Berg, BTG; Richard C. Jensen, Eng & TTG; Henry N. White, Radio Op.
Photo made at 381st BG, Ridgewell England following Schweunfurt raid, February 24, 1944

Q - Where did you train?
A - Oh, I started out in San Antonio at what they call the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. Then we took pre - flight training at Ellington Air Force Base near Houston, and then advanced navigation training in Hondo, Texas. Finally we had our overseas training in Kearney, Nebraska.

Q - When did you go overseas?
A - That was in December of 1943.

Q - Where in England were you based at?
A - Oh, I guess we were first about 30 miles north of London, a little east, and

about 15 miles south of Cambridge. Then after we got into our Pathfinder duty we went up to another base at Bassingbourne and a few places like that around the middle part of England.

Q - What was your Pathfinder duty?

A - Well, see, in the 8th Air Force, we flew 54 ship formations, and where the lead ship went, everyone else followed. And nothing burned me up more than to get into formation and that lead navigator get off course and get us shot up because you can see what is happening. Let me show you this map here. This is an actual map from World War II, a kind of map a navigator was given when you were flying. So if you were going to chart a course and you were going to bomb a target over somewhere, you would want to make your way past these areas of flak (anti - aircraft fire). You wouldn't want to fly into a concentration of flak. I got really upset with some of the navigators and voiced my objections to our commanding officer. Anyway, he took my crew out of the base and we went to a Pathfinder course. I don't know if that was good or bad. But we did get to lead the way on future missions.

Q - Do you ever contact any of your old crew or do you still keep in touch?

A - No. I do remember our co - pilot well. The co - pilots, you know, are kinda the law man on the totempole I guess you'd say. Bell Doherty was the co - pilot on our Pathfinder. His job was to fly tailgun position as we'd get a wing commander, usually anything from a general on down to a colonel who'd fly the co - pilot seat. So our co - pilot was in back with the tailgun calling off the positions of formation (to keep the other planes in place). He really didn't have a very exciting tour as a co-pilot. He went back to fly another tour of duty as a fighter pilot, P - 51's. And he was flying along about 15,000 feet over Belgium what I hear, and he went into a vertical dive and never came out of it. The pilot, Jim Tyson, stayed in the Air Force. I just learned three or four years ago that he was killed after the war on a take off in a military plane out of Washington, D.C. There weren't many survivors it seems.

Q - How many missions did you end up taking?

A - I guess I was credited with about thirty - three.

Q - Is there anything you can tell us about the March 6, 1944 mission to Berlin?

A - Yeah, it was a very interesting raid, a major raid. We were flying at that time, I think the name of our ship was "The Bucket of Bolts." We took off and our course into Berlin was along the parallel latitude 52 degrees 37'. We were supposed to come on in past Hanover, and then we swung down south of Berlin. We were supposed to come back and attack a ballbearing factory. All of a sudden the lead ship started heading to the south. We got to Osnabruck and they started sending up that black air mail flak and knocked the ship out of formation. So about that time I got on the horn with our co - pilot. He told the guys in the lead plane to get back on course. We were about twenty miles south off course. What I didn't know at that time was that there was an attack, a serious attack, by German fighters on the rest of the formation.

Jake Howland receiving Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) from Colonel Leber. DFC and Air Medal are seen to left.

The guys in that area were really getting zapped by the German fighters. But we were about 18 miles south and we missed that main first attack on the other group of planes. But as we came on east, we were headed right for Hanover. So I called the pilot again and said, "Tell the lead ship to get back on course. We're headed right for Hanover." I didn't want to fly in flak unnecessarily. So he called up and they told him,"Rearend Charlies, maintain radio silence over enemy territory." But anyway right after that we turned north. Something happened to the lead ship.

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Either they had a misfire or something. Anyway, they dropped some bombs before they were in range of their target. But the other ships, they watched the bombs, and as soon as the lead ship drops bombs their instructions are to drop theirs. So they threw bombs away, and wasted an entire mission. Then we started back out again, following this parallel latitude

Jake Howland showing "Flak Map" - indicates anti - aircraft gun centers. Melissa Hughey of Loblloy at right.

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about 52 degrees 37' north. We had few fighter attacks, but our main fighter attack where we really got jumped was further along. We lost only one ship out of our group that particular time. But these fellas in the other division got really hit. On that raid I think we lost 66 planes and 660 men.

Q - When you were in the Air Corps did you receive any decorations?

A - Oh yeah, there was the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medals, and a Presidential Unit Citation.

Q - What would you consider your purpose and success on bombing Germany?

A - There's no doubt that the efforts we did make were of great value and were important to the war. But I look back and I can't say that I'm proud of our generals. We should, I feel, that with the power, the tremendous air power we had, that the war should have been brought to a close before the end of 1944 instead of May,1945. We had 144 squadrons of heavy bombers that could strike any target in Geramny. Our mean point of impact was,from the target, approximately 2,000 feet down. Now if you want to hit a target and your bombs fall half a mile from that target you aren't doing well and don't accomplish much from such poor planning.

There was a general named Curtis LeMay. He lead the 8th Air Force, and he developed some of the combat box formations that we used which were necessary at a very serious time. These defensive formations were absolutely essential to survive. But later on, after D - Day, the attack on the Germans was sporadic. Really, our bombing did not slow their aircraft production at all. They increased their capacity to build airplanes despite the fact we were bombing them. I feel that the generals in Europe should have more or less followed the lead or the path taken by Curtis LeMay.

Curtis LeMay was later assigned to lead the 21st Air Force against Japan. He had a force then of approximately 500 planes, B - 29's. You have to consider that the bombers were a little larger, but they had to fly longer distances. It took more fuel and they might have carried a few more bombs. The commanders of the 8th Air Force in England and the 15th Air Force in Italy could put up over 1500 heavy bombers on any given day, and Curtis LeMay could put up about 500 planes. During the period March to July, 1945, Curtis LeMay followed his plan of attack. And his plan of attack was to destroy Japanese industry which had been disassembled and scattered throughout these tinderbox cities of Japan. He attacked Japan with fire bombs, and in that five month period he destroyed Japan's industrial power.

Now, we've heard so much about the atomic bombs that were dropped and how Japan was defeated. But Japan was done before the bombs were dropped. The atomic bombs were a face saving device for Japan. They could say, "Well, we can't go on because we can't stand in the light of that terrible weapon." This destroying of industry was Curtis LeMay's plan of attack that he carried out.

We didn't have a plan of attack against Germany. When I was flying my missions in the winter of 1944 we would attack the marshalling yards in Frankfurt, Germany. This is the railroad yard. If you hit it, first of all, you had planes scattered all over the sky. And how can you hit a target if you've got planes flying scattered all over the sky for half a mile. If you want to hit a target you have to aim for that target. With these big combat box formations it's impossible to do the precision bombing which we should have been doing. The planes are too spread out. And I think the principal target should have been Germany's transportation system. You could not move a German Tiger tank any way except by railroad.

If you have the one thing that we could do, and do very well, was to line up on target and kill the drift of the aircraft. Once you've killed the drift whatever you drop was gonna hit what was down underneath. Berlin was the ideal type target and was the center of the rail lines, a four million population, and a center of manufacturing. Now we would go on into Berlin. And the British, when they bombed, all they wanted to do was just kill the people. But that didn't stop the decentralized industry or anything.

However, if we could come on the rail line out of Stendal, 30 miles straight and level, you could line up and kill your drift. And whatever was below that plane was gonna get hit. And if you're trying to hit a rail line, it doesn't matter if you hit it one place or another. For every ten feet of track you destroy, they have to replace it with a ton of steel rail. Do you relaize that stuff weighs 200 pounds per foot for two tracks?

We'd take mine planes and they'd carry 108 - 500 pound bombs. Now you can do an awful lot of damage with 108 - 500 pound bombs. I feel that the big mistake that was made was the lack of a well defined attack plan by the 8th Air Force. There was a lot of politics. I didn't really think that much of my commanding officer in the 381st Bomb Group. I found him to be an incompetent navigator. You have to do what you're told to because when you're leading 54 ships you can't make any mistakes. One formation can turn into another. If you turn too sharp, people on the outside can't keep up with you. Everything is like, in slow motion. My pilot and I worked out some very good techniques for lead formations. My pilot Jim Tyson, was a true heavy bomber pilot. If I gave him a course of 154 degrees that's exactly what he'd do.

Wartime is a very serious time. I lost some friends. A good friend of mine, Bob Jones, was killed and buried in the Netherlands. In 1985 I found out the people there have adopted the Americans buried in their cemetaries, and he is one of them. The loss of friends is the sad and final part about war. I wrote a letter to the Dutch family who have been caring for the grave of my friend and thanked them.

Everett Woodard

As a part of our 50th anniversary observance of East Texas and World War II, we visited with our neighbor in Carthage, Everett Woodard. We also met his wife, Thelma, who he met and married in England during another tour with the Air Force following World War II. For Everett Woodard made a career in the Air Force beginning with the early days of the war.

Q - Where were you born?

A - I was born in Vernon, Texas on December 14, 1921.

Q - Where did you go to school and how big was your family?

A - I went to school in Frankston, Texas with my two sisters. My parents are both now dead. My mother died in 1947 and my dad about 1980.

Q - When did you go into the service?

A - I went in July, 1942.

Q - How long did you stay in the service?

A - Altogether I stayed about 24 and a half years.

Q - What has your life been like since World War II?

A - Well, when the war was over I got out of the service. And I stayed out two years while working. Then in 1947 I went back into the service. I stayed from that time until 1968 and retired.

Q - When did you get married?

A - I got married to Thelma in 1956 when I was back in England with the Air Force.

Q - How many children did you have?

A - We had just one child.

Q - What did you do after you retired from the from the Air Force?

A - I worked in Turkey for about eight and a half years. Then I worked in Saudi Arabia for awhile. I retired in 1986. That's when I quit working all together.

Q - Why did you go into the Air Corps back in World War II?

A - I was drafted! During the war you didn't have a choice whether you wanted in or out. You were just there. After I had been there I decided I would stay.

Q - How did you become gunner on a bomber?

A - When I first went in the service, I went in the Army. There was no Air Force. We were crawling around on our stomachs out in Vernon, Utah in hot sand. They wanted gunners so me and a buddy of mine just decided we would try it. We switched from the Army to the Air Force. It was really the Army Air Corps then.

Q - Where did you train to become a gunner?

A - I was a Nellis just outside Las Vegas, Neveda. I had seven weeks of gunner's training, and went from there to Amarillo, Texas for six months.

Q - When did you go overseas?

A - I went overseas in September, 1943. I was on the Queen Elizabeth to England.

Q - Were you based in England?

A - During the war I was in England. I flew out of England over Germany. During my career in the Air Force I went back to England twice more.

Q - Were you in a squadron?

A - I was in the 445th Squadron of the 384th Bomb Group. We flew in B - 17 bombers.

Q - Have you stayed in touch with anyone you were with then?

A - Only one, and I recently got in touch with him.

Q - So, its been hard to find them?

A - Well, when we first got out of the service we sort of stayed in touch for two or three years. Then we just gradually quit. They have a reunion of the Group every year but I've never gone to any of them. I got all the paperwork and everything from them yesterday. They're having the next reunion in Wichita, Kansas, but I doubt I'll go. After all these years you wouldn't remember anyone anyway.

Q - How many missions did you go on when you were flying against the Germans?

A - I flew 31 missions.

Q - I guess your mission to Brunswick, Germany on June 30, 1944 was your most memorable. How many planes did you shoot down that day?

A - Actually I only destroyed one for sure, They said I probably destroyed another one as well.

Q - How did you go about destroying the planes?

The Crew

1. Top Row - Engineer, Jarvis; Radio Op, Rex Dahms; Everett Woodard (R waist gunner); tail gunner, Cahll; James Douglas (Ballcurrent gunner).
Front - Jim Hines, Pilot; Burke, Co Pilot; name unknown, Navigator, Bombadier, Morris. One missing - L W gunner; Wilson (wounded after Brunswick).

A - Well, they came in and attacked the formation. There were probably 75 enemy fighters. So you would try to destroy them or they would destroy you.

Q - Were you proud when you got the Silver Star?

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A - Later I was, but at the time it didn't mean much of anything to me. It was something you got for something you had to do. After the war I got to thinking about it all, but at the time I just wanted out of there.

Q - Did you receive the Purple Heart for that same raid to Brunswick?

A - Yes it was the same day. It's when I got wounded in the legs while fighting off those fighters.

Everett Woodard also shared two newspaper articles with us relating to his career. The first one appeared in the Frankston, Texas paper in 1944 after the Brunswick raid.

S/Sgt. Everett D. (Durwood) Woodard, of Frankston, has been awarded the Silver Star for "gallantry in action", and praised highly by his commanding officer for his "skillful airmanship", displayed during a bombing mission over Germany on January 30.

"According to the citation which accompanied the recommendation for the Silver Star, S/Sgt. Woodard, who is 22 years old, prevented "the almost certain destruction of his plane" by manning both waist gun positions by himself when his comrade gunner was knocked out, badly wounded by an explosion of an enemy shell in the gun position, an explosion which also wounded Sgt. Woodard in one leg.

Sgt. Woodard, who is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Everett D. Woodard, Sr., of Frankston, is a waist gunner on a Flying Fortress. He has been stationed in England for several months with the American Army Air Forces, and previously had been given the American Air Medal "for exceptionally meritorious achievement while participating in five separate bomber combat missions over enemy occupied Continental Europe."

Woodard was credited in the citation with definitely destroying one enemy aircraft and probably destroying another during the time he was firing first one waist gun and then the other in warding off continuous, vicious attacks of the enemy fighter planes which attacked his formation while over Europe and which followed it part of the way back on the return trip to their English bases.

A complete copy of the citation given Sgt. Woodard follows:

S/Sgt. Everett D. Woodard,
xxxth Bombardment Squadron,
xxxth bombardment Group (H),

"I take great pleasure in being able to recommend you for the Silver Star for your gallantry in action on the bombing mission over Germany on 30 January 1944. The example of skillful airmanship you displayed on this mission was a credit to yourself and the Group. It is through such acts that we are able to continually press home our blows to the enemy and assures us of ultimate victory, as well as the entire xxxth Bombardment Group (H) AAF, am proud of you for your courageous actions.

"The following citation was attached to your recommendation:

"For gallantry in action while serving as right waist Gunner on a bombing mission to Brunswick, Germany, 30 January 1944. Flying in the low squadron of the low group, S/Sgt. Woodard's aircraft approaching the I.P. encountered an unexpected cloud formation. Proceeding through these clouds the squadron became separated from the remainder of the group and was suddenly attacked by twenty (20) enemy fighters, which, coming from the cloud bank, rode in on the aircraft's condensation trails and were at almost point-blank range before effective fire cloud be directed upon them. In the first blast of fire S/Sgt. Woodard was wounded in the leg by the explosion of a 20 MM shell in his gun position and his left waist gunner was struck a number of times, badly wounded and thrown bleeding and in great pain upon the floor. With complete disregard for his wound or for his own personal safety, despite the repeated strikes upon his aircraft and the suddenness and

Melody Mims and Thelma and Everett Woodard

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viciousness of the attack, S/Sgt. Woodard manned both waist gun positions, firing first one and then the other, warding off enemy attacks so effectively that he destroyed one enemy fighter aircraft and probably destroyed another and enabled his pilot, who had begun evasive action, to prevent the almost certain destruction of their plane. These attacks had been pressed so closely and aggressively by the enemy fighters that three of our planes were destroyed and another so badly damaged that it was forced to turn

Amy Singleton and Everett Woodard

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back. The No. 4 engine of S/Sgt. Woodard's plane was struck and began to run wild. Two large holes were blown in the right wing, and there was a large hole in the left wing aft the No. 2 engine. Two large holes were ripped in the rudder, part of the skin at the waist was shot away, the right stabilizer damaged beyond use and the fuselage punctured with numerous small holes. Both the top and ball turrets were shot out of action and became inoperative during the later stage of the attack, the entire oxygen system was destroyed and even though the pilot was diving the aircraft violently and partly out of control for a lower altitude S/Sgt. Woodard continued to man his gun positions and ward off enemy attacks. During a lull in the action he gave efficient emergency first aid to his wounded companion and wrapped him in clothing and blankets to prevent exposure. Separated from the group, deep in enemy country, badly damaged and with great uncertainty as to their ability to return to England, flying at reduced speed and very low altitude, subject to imminent danger of attack by enemy fighters and anti-aircraft batteries, S/Sgt. Woodard gave an outstanding demonstration of force and courage by assisting in jettisoning all removable equipment to lighten the load, manning both his gun positions and giving encouragement to his fellow crew members. S/Sgt. Woodard's gallantry in this action, his outstanding example of courage, coolness, self-negation for the safety of his fellow crew members and his intelligent use of all facilities available have been an inspiration for his organization.

(Signed) DALE O. SMITH
Colonel, Air Corps,
Commanding

The second article appeared in an Air Force newspaper in the 1950's and gave a summary of M-Sgt. Woodard's career up to that time.

M-Sgt. Everett Woodard, Motor Pool supervisor, is in this month's featured NCO. A man with many impressive medals, including the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, the tall, lanky Texan is a veteran with 12 Air Force years to his credit.

Born in Tyler, Texas in 1921, "Woody" entered the Army Air Corps in 1942 at the age of 20.

He received aerial gunnery training at Nellis AFB, Nevada, and graduated from Aircraft Maintenance School at Amarillo Air Terminal. In October 1943, after eight weeks Air Combat Training school at Scott AFB, Ill. and Delhart AFB, Texas, Woody was assigned as a gunner and aerial engineer to the 384th Heavy Bombardment Group, Grafton Underwood RAF Station, England.

On January 30, 1944 while on his ninth mission over Germany, his squadron of seven B-17s was attacked by 26 enemy fighters. Woody, a waist gunner, was hit in both legs by shrapnel from 50mm cannon. His crew mate who operated the opposite waist gun was also severely wounded. Although injured himself, Woody administered first aid to his crewmate and manned both guns.

During the attack, Sgt. Woodard was credited with destroying one enemy fighter and severely damaging another. For saving his crew mate's life and for bravery beyond the call of duty, Sgt. Woodard received the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. In later missions he added another enemy fighter to his list.

Sgt. Woodard spent 23 days in the hospital and nine days recuperating before he returned to flying missions. At the end of his tour, with 31 missions completed, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Goes Stateside

Returning to the states as a T-Sgt. in October 1944, Woody was stationed at Liberal AFB, Kansas, as a heavy equipment operator.

In September 1945, he was discharged and went to work as a tractor trailer driver of the Bridges Wholesale Grocery Company. When the United States Air Force was organized in 1947, Sgt. Woodard reenlisted at Denver, Col. as a S-Sgt. and was assigned to Geiger Field, in Washington as a transportation supervisor.

Overseas Again

In 1948, he was sent to Johnson AFB, Japan. In June 1950 he returned to the states where he remained for two years until his reassignment to Weathers Field, England in June 1950. He came back to the US and Bakalar in October 1954.

Other awards include the Victory ETO, Occupation and Good Conduct Ribbons. Along with the Silver Star, DFC, and Purple Heart, that display of decorations is impressive in any man's book.

Everett **Woodard's decorations** and medals - from top L to R, Silver Star, Air Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross; middle, is the Purple Heart and Good Conduct Medal; bottom, the campaign medals.

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James Brewster

James Brewster is a native of Panola County. During his service in England in World War II he met and married his wife, Anne and they both returned here after the war.

While serving with the 8th Air Force, James Brewster was among those who stayed on the ground while supporting those who flew against Hitlers Germany. His excellent performance resulted in his winning the Bronze Star Medal. The citation in part reads "under his leadership condition ... in one period of 49 consecutive combat efficiency of the squadron returned early because of mechanical disorder ... he maintained an ideal to perfect maintenance which added to the combat efficiency of the squadron and the success of its missions.

Q - When and where were you born?
A - I was born in the Del Roy Community near Carthage, Texas on May 3, 1920.

Q - What kind of early life and schooling did you have?
A - Mine was just a regular country life as I was raised on a farm here. I went to Carthage High School. First year I was there I was in eighth grade when the school building burned down. We then went half - a - day for a year or two.

Q - When during World War II did go into the service?
A - That was on January 2, 1942.

Q - And what have done since you left the service after World War II?
A - Well, I worked for the Postal Service. I worked there until I retired.

Q - When and to whom did you get married?
A - I married a little blonde - headed girl in London, England in 1944 at 2:30 in the afternoon of December 23. She came back to Texas as an English war-bride.

Q - Where did you go for your Air Corps training in World War II?
A - I was at Shepherd Field, Texas.

Q - When did you go overseas?
A - I went in May, 1943 and was stationed at Ridgewell, England. That's 40 miles north of London and 35 miles from Cambridge.

Q - What squadron were with?
A - I was with 534th Squadron of the 381st Bomb Group.

Q - Did you stay in touch, after the war, with some of the people you served with?
A - We are currently having reunions every year. Our next reunion will be in Madison, Wisconsin some time July. I

M/Sgt James Brewster and B-17 "Via Panola Express" in England during World War II.

can't go this time but have been to the past reunions.

Q - What were your duties with the ground crew?

A - I was the Line Chief, in charge of maintenance on our airplanes. They were the B-17 bombers. Twelve planes of our squadron would leave on a mission, and then we'd service those returned. We'd stay up all night if that is what is

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James Brewster at home, 1990.

what it took to get our planes ready to fly again. We worked hard to support those flying against Germany.

Q - Do you have any remembrances of any particular times during the war?
A - When they had the Battle of the Bulge we stayed on the line two weeks without any rest servicing the planes to keep them flying. We didn't have time to change clothes or anything. When it was over I went into London for R and R (rest and recuperation). I had earned

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it. But then living through the "buzz bombs" there was an experience.

Q - What kind of decorations or medals did you earn during the war?

A - Well, I came home with a variety of things: the Bronze Star Medal, two Presidential Citation, a Good Conduct Medal, and the European Campaign Medal with six battle stars. My first campaign medal was as a flight engineer on anti-submarine patrol in the area off Seattle near Alaska that's before I went to Europe.

Q - What were the effects of bombing Germany?

A - After the war was over we went to Germany to see where we bombed. Everything in the cities was flattened. People were living under rock piles and they were very hostile. Some of the women would come out and chunk rocks at us. There were close living quarters over there and lots of these homes were destroyed along with the industry. The destruction was unbelievable.

Q - Do you think the bombing was successful?

A - The bombing was successful because the British went at night and we went during the day. They couldn't get any sleep at night or during the day because we were constantly bombing them. Thousands of people perished in that bombing.

Q - Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the war?

A - I don't think there will be another big war. It will be more like terrorist attacks and things like that. If you were to have another war it would take ten minutes to destroy everything. So I don't think that will happen again. People would only destroy themselves.

James Brewster, Kena Baxley, and Jeniffer Johnson with copy of book on 381st Bomb Group he presented to Gary School Library.

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Anne Brewster

We met Anne Brewster when we first went to interview her husband James. He had served with the 8th Air Force in England during World War II. So we discovered he had met and married Anne, and she came to America as an English "war bride." We returned to visit with her to discover her experiences of World War II as well. And we wanted to find out how she discovered East Texas to be different from London, and how she adjusted to a new way of life as a new wife in a strange land.

Q - Where and when were you born?

A - I was born in London, England April, 1926.

Q - What was your life like when you were growing up?

A - There was just me my brother, my sister, my mother, and my dad. My mother and father had come from Scotland and my dad had been with the Guards at the Palace for several years. He stood wearing one of those big bear skin hats. Then the Depression came and he got out of the Army and went and got a job and worked for the railway. We were just a poor family, a working class family.

Q - What about your school?

A - Schooling was a lot different from American schools. They had boys in one big building and girls in another big building. We weren't allowed to wear make-up or have our hair cut really short. And girls all wore uniforms. It was called a drill - slip (like a black jumper) with a white blouse, black stockings, and black shoes. And we wore

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a big, wide tribby hat. It had a big brim. And we had our school emblem on the hat. It was really strict. It just wasn't like American schools. We started school when we were three and finished when we were fourteen. And there was no graduation exercises, no proms, no senior rings, no dances in school, no parties, and we had two months off for vacation in the summer time.

Q - Do you remember the beginning of World War II and what is was like?

A - I was about twelve when the war started. Children don't take wars very seriously. But we were all issued gas masks. And it was mandatory that we carried the masks everywhere we went. There was a rumor that the Germans were going to use gas warfare. They never did in England, but we had to carry gas masks all during the war where ever we went.

I was still going to school, and Hitler said he was going to bomb London. They were afraid all the youngsters would be killed because the bombing would be so thick. So thev evacuated all the children. You had to pack one small suitcase. And your parents would take you to the railroad station and we'd each wear name tags. And each school, and each class were sent to a different city out of London. Our parents didn't even know where we were going. And I went to Bath in Somerset and my sister went to wales. In the towns where they sent the children to, people took them in their homes whether they wanted to or not, the government made them take one or two children. And they had make - shift schools and churches and tried to educate us. We weren't allowed to write or call our parents or have them call us. They were afraid they would find out where we were and bomb us where we were at. And we stayed gone almost nine months. With us homesick they finally let us go back into London. But there wasn't much schooling because there were air raids every day. You would no sooner get in the classroom than the air raid sirens would go off, and you'd have to go to the air raid shelter. And that went on until I finished school at the age of fourteen.

Q - How did you feel about what was happening to your country?

A - I was scared most of the time. I really didn't realize what was going on, just that war was going on with fighter planes up above. At that age it was different from when you're older.

Q - Did the war change your family life?

A - Well, at first it did with the air raids. After two or three years of it we had a routine of going to work, and coming home, and sleeping in the air raid shelter. And when the "buzz bombs" came over you just hoped they weren't for you. It changed our life some but not a whole lot. My dad was too old to be in the army and my brother was too young. So no one in the immediate family was in the service.

Q - What was your air raid shelter like?

A - It was just like a tin shed put on top of the ground, and then they covered it with dirt, a thick layer of dirt. There was a door, and there were little bunks in there so you could lie down and sleep. But it wouldn't protect you from a direct hit. It would protect you from shrapnel, flying metal.

Q - Can you explain to us what it was like to try to get food?
A - It was hard because we were rationed everything. We got two ounces of bacon a week, one egg if you could find it. Horse meat tastes a lot better than you'd think it would. It tastes almost like steak except for the fat which looks yellow. And we didn't have any fresh fruit of any kind except on the black market. James gave two dollars for a peach one time. Clothing was rationed too. You were allowed two pairs of stockings a year, and one dress, and a blouse, and one set of underwear a year.

Q - Did you have the little coupons to get the food?
A - We had food and clothing coupons.

Q - What do you remember about the Blitz in London and how much damage was caused by it?
A - Well, we lived on the far side of London. The Blitz hit the docks and the lower class areas. We could see the fires. We got mostly the "buzz bombs." They'd send these planes over and they droned. And when they stopped droning they dropped these bombs. And it would bury in the ground. It wouldn't explode. It was like a time bomb. We experienced more of that. When they did hit anywhere near us, the only damage we had was all our windows were blown out. The house wasn't demolished.

Q - What kind of work did you do? Could you work where you wanted to?
A - During the war it was government regulated, you had to go where they sent you. I finished school at fourteen. Then I went out in the country by bus daily to work where they had barrage balloons. They're like blimps. And they

had cables connected to the ground. They had those so the German planes would hit the urres. I worked there quite awhile and then they sent me to a factory where I ran a three lathe drill for a year and a half. And from there they sent me to Huntington Station, one of the biggest railroad stations in England. It was mostly used for troop trains. And the troops coming were coming through there and we served meals for them. I worked the three to eleven shift. When it got dark the air raids started. And they bombed us all during the night until the next morning. It was about seven or eight miles from where I lived. So I'd go home alone at eleven at night. There'd be nobody to meet you. And it would be black - out and there'd be no lights in the streets, no lights in the houses. It was kind of scary. I was about seventeen years old then.

Q - How did the coming of the Americans change things in England?

A - When the Americans came they had so much more money than the English soldiers, people thought they were bragging and throwing money around. There was so much difference in pay between an American and an English private. Also the Americans were getting all the girls too.

Q - When and where did you meet Mr. Brewster (husband James)?

A - I was going on vacation to Scotland and there was a little town, where a friend of the family owned a tavern. And I stopped over to spend the weekend with them before I went on to Scotland. The owner had a daughter my age, and we were friends. And then, you went everywhere by bicycle. We were riding around the air base, and we weren't watching what we were doing and our two front wheels met and we had a wreck. I ended up with a big black eye. So that night some American soldiers came to the tavern. They played cards and James happened to be with them, and by chance I was sitting next to him. He asked me for my address. I really didn't like Americans at the time. I was just seventeen, and you know how silly you are at that age. I went on to Scotland, and after my vacation I didn't think any more about it until I came back. Two or three weeks after that he called me. He said he was coming to London. He was based outside of London. My mother didn't like Americans at all, but my daddy did. That was in March, 1944 when we started going together. And then we got married in December. Then when an American wanted to marry an English girl he had to put in an application to the base commander and they gave you a three month cooling off period. For three months they investigated you, to find out what kind of person you were. Then they scheduled an interview on the base and the commanders interviewed you. After that you could get married. I was just eighteen and then at that age you couldn't get married unless both your father and mother gave three written permissions because normally it was against the law to get married unless you were twenty-one. So we got married December 23rd.

Q - When did you come to United States?

A - I came in 1946. My daughter Linda was born over there. When the war was over James came back to the United States and I was three months pregnant at that

Anne and James Brewster, together since World War II.

time. They wouldn't let me travel then. I had to wait until she was five months old. When they told us the ship would be ready they sent us wives who had children to a Prisoner - of - war camp and we stayed there for two weeks before we got on the boat. We were twelve days on the water before we came into New York.

Q - What did it take to get a passport then?

A - I just had to go the American Embassy for it. It didn't take very long to get it. There were lots of travel

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restrictions and you had to wait to go anywhere, the ocean was still covered with mines from the war and they were trying to sweep them clear. We ran into a storm coming over and I got the sickest I've ever been.

Q - What was your first impression of Carthage, Texas when you got here?

A - I came into Marshall. James went to New York to meet me. It took longer to cross than expected and he had to wait there for a week. While he was up there his only brother was killed in Kilgore. I came into New York and we couldn't get a flight to be here for the funeral. We could only get one seat. Linda was sick too. We arrived finally after the funeral.

America was completely different from England. Mrs. Brewster, James's mother, lived in a small frame house with no running water. There was an outhouse, I'd never seen one of those before. [illegible] to me, the [illegible] There were [illegible] Everybody [illegible] For awhile I thought [illegible] but they were just being friendly. I just wasn't used to that then. There were so many names. I still meet people on the street whom I recognize but I can't always remember their names. They say, "I met you when you first came over here."

Q - How is Carthage different from London?

A - Just everything was different. Sheets then were made out of four flour sacks. Have you seen them? The stores were different. And I thought everybody in America slept on sheets with seams in them. I'd been here three years before I saw regular sheets.

I'd never seen a pig killed before. They cooked everything in that pig. And I didn't know you could fry a chicken. I thought you could just boil it or bake it. I'd never seen peas before except for English peas. Black - eyed peas and corn - on - the - cob were first time experiences. Well, I did, at the railroad station they had a place which sold exotic things from other countries and my girl friend and I saw this corn from America. We went in and bought an ear and shucked it. We thought that was the way you ate it. And they don't use seasoning on their food over there. They don't have corn bread. And their biscuits are called scones and they are cookies over there. Everything here is different. When my mother called the meals in the kitchen, then she served the plate and brought the plate to you. You can imagine how different that part was. And the heat was new. I was used to temperature getting just 70 degrees. People couldn't understand me and I couldn't understand them. I've lost my accent altogether.

Q - What has your life been since you arrived here?

A - It's been great. The best thing I've ever done was come to America. I like it here. I like the people. We've had a good life. I here and James built this house about the same time and I haven't moved in over forty years.

Q - Have you returned to England?

A - I've been back seven times. The last time I went back was a year ago in March for my brother - in - laws funeral. But things are not the same there anymore. I could never go back to stay. You think you can go back but everything has changed.

Jim Box

Jim Box is a neighbor and friend and a retired Gary school teacher. He and his wife Annie now live in Gary where he is a rancher. Fifty years ago Jim Box chose to go off to war and become a pilot with the Army Air Corps. Here is his story he shared with us.

Q - Where and when were you born?
A - I was born in Fort Worth, Texas in 1922.

Q - What about your family and schools?
A - I had one sister and two fine parents. I went to riverside High in Fort Worth.

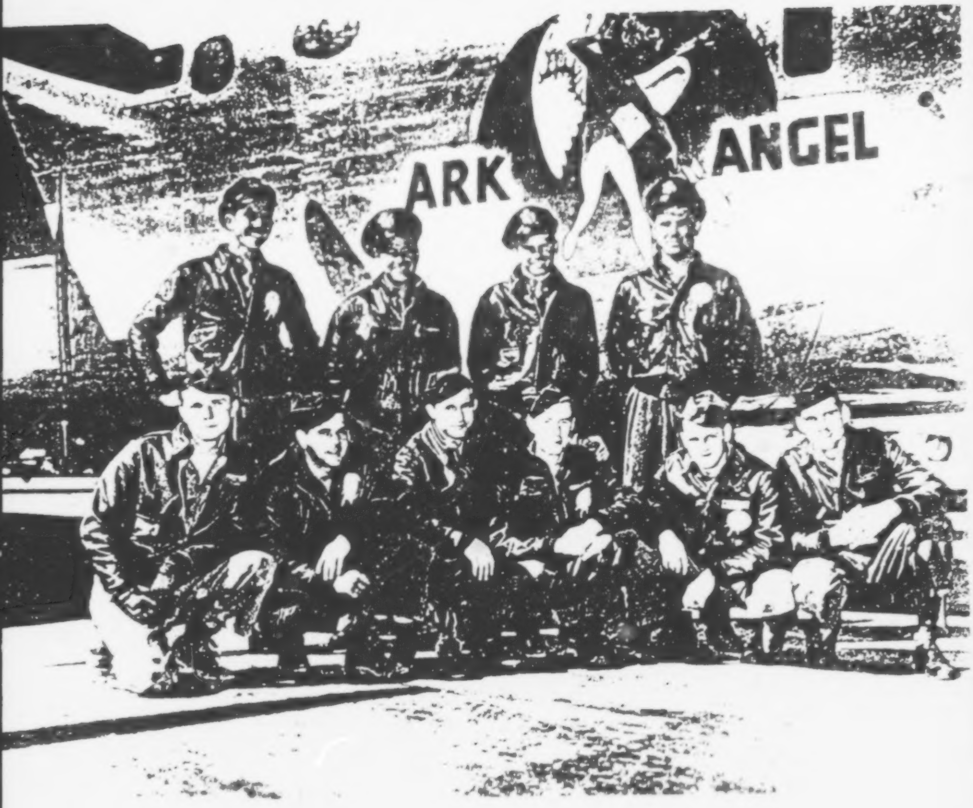
Q - When did you enter the military in World War II?
A - I went into the service just after Pearl Harbor in 1942.

In our squadron I painted the name and insignia of about eight airplanes. Now the "Ark Angel" was spelled A-R-K because the B-24 looked like a big boat and the Angel was the avenging angel for getting the Germans for what they done to London. The plane emblem was a nude blonde angel who was not all lewd. As you can see from the picture she was a very sedate young lady. But because of the criticism of some of the other nudes painted on planes, when we got to Morrison Field in Florida on our way to South America and going overseas, they made me paint a bathing suit on her. So I painted a bathing suit on her with water paint which we washed off as soon as we got out of the states and in Trinidad.

Q - How many missions did you fly against the Germans?

A - When we went over the number of missions scheduled for the 8th Air Force was 25 to have a completed tour. While we were en route between the United States and England the number was changed to 30. So when we arrived we were scheduled to fly 30 missions. The number of missions was based on the idea of keeping the loss rate below 50%. So if the loss rate went down, they increased the number of missions. In our particular case, after we had about 25 missions, the loss rate was low enough overall for the 8th Air Force, so they increased the number of missions to 35 missions. And so it was prorated between the number we had flown and the 35. We ended up flying 31 as our quota.

Q - What was your toughest mission? I don't think we thought as any of them being easier or tougher. I guess the one that woke me up most was the one I got



The ark Angel crew - top row: Capt. Linus (Jim) Box, Pilot; Lt. H.J. Stephens, Navigator; Lt. Roy M. Hall, Bombardier; Lt. George Shiavas, Co-Pilot: Kneeling: S/Sgt. Lou Szaflraski, Gunner; T/Sgt. Don Hassen, Flight Engineer; T/Sgt. H. Dale Signore, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. H.L. McLallan, Tail Gunner; S/Sgt. E.T. James, Engineer Gunner; T/Sgt. John Keene, Ground crew chief; Not shown: S/Sgt. O.J.A. Brien, Ball Turret Gunner.

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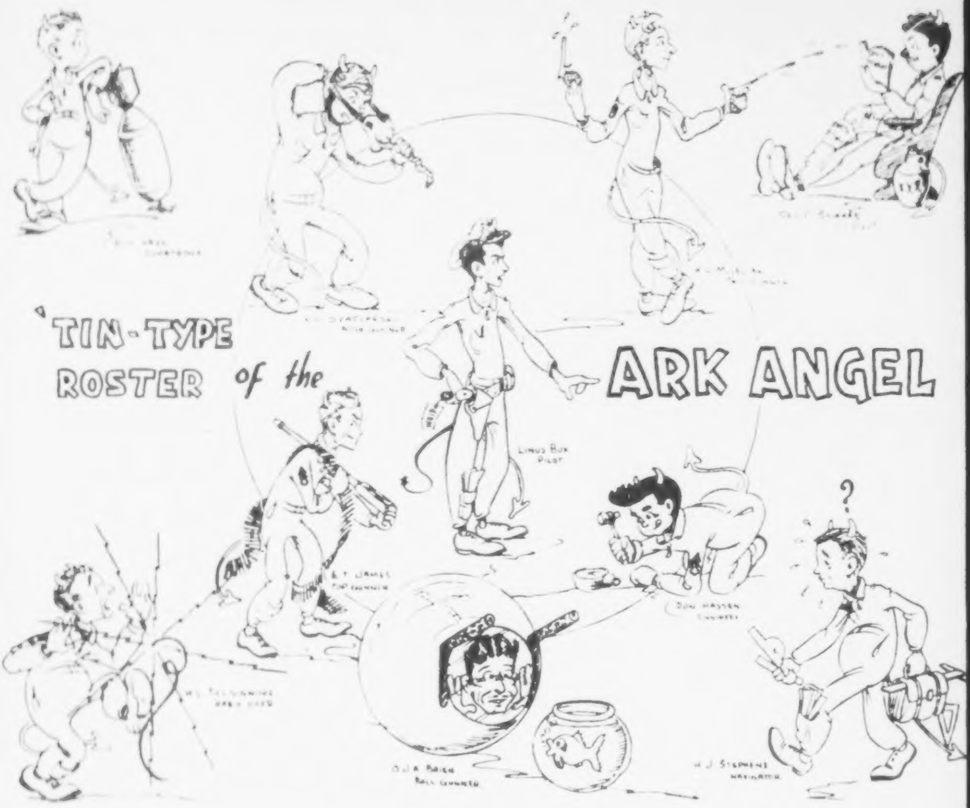
TIN-TYPE ROSTER of the ARK ANGEL
LINUS BOX PILOT
E.T. JAMES TOP GUNNER
DON HASSEN ENGINEER
BALL GUNNER
H.J. STEPHENS NAVIGATOR
?

Cartoon of Jim Box and his crew drawn by Jim Box.

hit on. My engineer got hit too, both by flak. But neither one of us got hit seriously. We got Purple Hearts for it, but we weren't hurt really bad. The shrapnel ruined a new pair of trousers I was wearing.

Q - Do you remember a mission as being your most successful one?

I guess the only time we didn't have a specific military target was a mission to

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Munich. This was a deep penetration into Germany. And on Munich our Briefing Officer told us our target was the beer hall where Hitler got his start. And so I was over downtown Munich and aiming for the middle of the city. And at that time, airplanes from Italy came in and we interconnected over Munich. So there were 3,000 planes bombing Munich at one time.

Q - Which decorations did you earn?

A - I got four Air Medals, a Purple Heart, Distinguished Flying Cross, and a Commendation Medal. I received the European Theater Medal with five battle stars.

Q - Was the bombing effort successful?

A - One thing the strategic bombing was designed to disrupt the productivity of the German factories and to disrupt their transportation system. The Germans were very ingenious in overcoming the obstacles. We wiped out the marshalling yards for their railroads. We tore them up completely and they'd have them back in operation in three or four days. They were geniuses at doing this. We concentrated on different phases of their operations. We bombed their refineries and knocked out their fuel supply. They'd make that up in some other place. One of the big raids of all times was when we bombed a ball bearing factory Intelligence found out that ball bearings were made in one place in Germany. So they bombed the ball bearing factory to try to disrupt the aircraft production, tank production, and everything else by hitting one factory. It was a very expensive raid in terms of planes and men.

Q - What have you done since World War II in terms of family and career?
A - I stayed in the Air Force and kind of got fed up with the peacetime Air Force. I left that and went broke trying to run a daily newspaper. That was in Mississippi. I came to Texas and went to work for another newspaper. Then I went back to college and I taught journalism in college at San Marcos. I went back to the newspaper business, and then started teaching high school. I ended up teaching at Gary for one semester before I retired from teaching. Now I am raising Red Brangus Cattle, and I'm having more fun than I've ever had in my life.

Q - When did you get married?
Annie and I have been married for about 15 years. I was married before the war and I have a daughter that was born before the war too.

Bob Beaty

We visited with our friend and neighbor Bob Beaty about his service and remembrances of World War II. As a young lad he went off to serve as a gunner with the Army Air Corps. He was a pioneer in that he flew with the first group to fly the B-29 "Super Fortress" bomber against the Japanese in the Far East. Mr. Beaty also got to see much of the world then from the pyramids of Egypt to the Great Wall of China. And he had a role in training the crews which rained bombs on Japan and hastened the end of World War II.

I was born in north Louisiana at the age of two months I came to Texas. I went to Carthage schools all my life and graduated from high school many years ago, in 1939. Then since we were so much smarter, then it only took us eleven years to get out of high school.

In December, 1941 I was working in Carthage at a service station. And on

December 7th the news came over the radio that we were at war after the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. I was 18 years old at the time. Did the war effect me? It did ! In January, 1943 I went into the Air Corps. It had always been my ambition to fly.

We trained first of all in Florida. It was a beautiful place there. We stayed at the best hotel, and swam in the ocean. There was a beautiful beach. From there I went to Denver, Colorado. In Denver we trained to fly a plane that really existed on the drawing board. There were no B - 29's, but we were training for them.

We needed something fast with a long range. We needed a plane to reach over the Japanese Empire. In Europe we had England for a rigid base. We could bomb all over Europe from England. But that wasn't true in the Pacific. In Europe they might have a 3-4 hour mission, while in the Pacific we were going to have them lasting 16-18 hours from China.

So we trained there. We had the B-29, remote control gunnery with central fire control like on a battleship. You'd move a little sight weighing three pounds and that would move two turrets weighing 1500 pounds each. That was my job. I could direct the fire with my finger. so we built the big planes and tried them out. We flew the XB - 29's and the TB-29's. We trained in Kansas. There were only four bases at the time for training on the B-29. We were the 40th Bomb Group. We got our planes ready, and got the bugs out of them as much as we could. They were in a hurry for us. General

"Hap" Arnold was in command of the Army Air Corps. He got us ready to go overseas.

One really cool morning in March, 1944 we took off. We knew we were going overseas but had no idea where. The front bombbay was loaded with all of our clothes. The back bombbay was loaded with spare parts for our plane. We took off and landed in Presque Isle, Maine. From there we flew to Newfoundland, called Gander Field. The snow was four foot deep on each side of the runway. And snow fell with flakes the size of fifty cent pieces. We'd never seen anything like it. For a southern boy who had only seen snow three times in his life it was a thrill.

We took off again one night and could see the ice flows. We headed on a southeasterly course. As day light approached, and going east it made the night that much shorter. The plane was

"Hump Happy Pappy" - the B - 29 which flew Bob Beaty home.

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pretty good size, it was 14 feet, 6 inches wide. It was 99 feet, 6 inches long. We got close to the coast of Africa and the plane flew on edge. I said, to the pilot, "Skipper, what's happening?" We looked to our left and saw a large armada you might say (a big convoy of American ships). We didn't dare fly over them for very obvious reasons. They'd never seen a B-29 and if they thought we were a German plane they'd have taken care of us in a short order. They had aircraft carriers which were heading into the wind to launch their planes so we gave them a quick IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) so they'd know who we were. It was a radio signal coded for a certain day so you'd better have it right.

We pulled in just below Casablanca at an air base called Marrakech (on the coast of West Africa). The contrast from 26 degrees (in Newfoundland) to 110 degrees (in Africa) was very obvious when we landed. Everyone came and told us we were crazy. We had on our heavy flying suits. They came up asking for our canteens. We asked, "What in the world do you want with my canteen?" They replied, "We want a drink of cool water." You see it was so hot there they couldn't get any cool water. Water came out of Lister bags standing out inn the sun. They were thrilled to have a drink of cold water.

From Marrakech we flew all the way across North Africa. We flew over where the battles had been fought by Patton and the German Africa Corp, where they had done their fighting. Then we flew over where Rommel had fought against Montgomery, the greatest of all the

British generals. We could see where the ruined tanks were still spread out over the battlefields in the desert. We flew to where the desert came to an end and we saw a big green strip in front of us. It was the Nile River, and we landed in Cairo, Egypt. They gave us the $3 tour. We flew around the pyramids and the sphinx and landed in Cairo. From there we went on to Karachi, India-called the Gateway to India. From there we flew to the eastern part of India, just out of Calcutta. We had four bases there.

These were the first B - 29's to go in combat. There were no airfields big enough for us. So the Indians built the airfields by hand. There would be strings of people like ants, and on their hips they would carry woven (some kind of fiber) trays. And the women would fill those trays with dirt and put the tray on their heads and then walk 300-400 yards or half a mile and then dump the dirt. They determined how fast they built the airfields. It wasn't working.

So they got in some of our troops-a detachment of Black engineers and they built our airfield. See, our runways had to be 8,000 - 10,000 feet long to take off. Then it was time to fly our first mission. June 5, 1944. It was a really still morning. I was supposed to be assigned to one plane when they divided the crews up. But a major walked in and said, "I want a good central power control gunner." And they said, "Get Beaty, Major Koenig, he's from Texas too." And the major said, "I'll take him." It was a hot, humid morning. The plane I should have been in that morning, I watched it lift off. It was weighing 136,000 pounds. It had twenty - four 5000 pound bombs on it. It had 8,000 gallons of gasoline and you know aviation gasoline is very high test. That plane lifted up in front of us. We were behind it. We gave it the old "Ding How" signal or thumbs up, wishing them the very best. We watched him lift up and he lost his number one engine. He dropped and crashed in front of us on the runway where we were revving up getting ready to take off. As he crashed his bombs began to blow up. All but one man in the crew was killed. One man was blown away from the plane still attached to his seat. That man lived.

We took off and the exploding bombs threw our nose up in the air. It seemed like we flew with the tail hanging down for about ten miles. I said I was paddling along with one hand just above the tree tops. When we got past the explosion site another bomb went off and kicked our tail up so we were level. We flew for 10 -15 miles just above the tree tops, real sluggish. We pulled up and went to Bangkok in Thailand. It was a beautiful place. There I saw my first Japanese fighter. They were a beautiful sight to see. They were very trim, very well flown, excellent little ships. They could fly circles around us.

The tail gunner of the "Memphis Belle", one of the most famous B - 17's of the European Theater was in our squadron. He said, "Bob the first enemy plane you see in the flight it doesn't matter if he is five miles off, shoot at him." I did ! I was surprised! Those little red baseballs I was throwing at him out there (tracers shells were one of every five shells out our guns - also two armor piercing and two incendiary shells) showed me where I was shooting. I shot a few rounds and they went right past his tail. I said, "You son of a gun, you come up close and I'll hit you." He found he had made a mistake because we weren't flying B - 17's. He flew up over us and I could see the puffs where I was hitting his plane. The last I saw of him he was diving straight down. If he ever pulled out I don't know because when I looked out our number one engine was feathering (stopping). We thought the enemy fighter had shot out the engine. We found out later that the engine had just malfunctioned. We flew back all the way like that through a thunderstorm and dropped 6,000 feet. We got back but we did lose a few planes that day. I had a friend whose plane crashed in the Bay of Bengal. Two of the men were drowned in

Combat Missions Plane - #275 - "Old Crackerty" the crash, two of the others floated all night and were picked up later on.

Then we began to fly other missions. We began to fly over China. Do you remember what the Himalayan Mountains are? That's the largest mountain range in the world. Mt. Everest, the world's highest, is there. We flew across there, called "The Hump," from India to China. We were fighting the war on a shoe string. Everything was going to the European Theater because we were going to invade Germany after going into France from Normandy. And we were not able at that time to manufacture enough stuff to fight a war on two fronts. So we were literally "poor - boying" the war against Japan.

We flew our gasoline ourselves across "The Hump" into China and stock piled it. We carried our bombs into China for the same purpose. The Chinese bases were built by hand. They would bring the rocks in from a river bed, and crush them into little pieces. I have a picture somewhere of the Chinese pulling big rollers. There would be 150 - 200 of them pulling a large roller to press down the gravel to make it hard enough so that we could take off from the runways they'd made.

We pulled our first mission, the first one flying from China after we moved from flying out of India. We flew to Manchuria (north China) which you know is adjacent to Russia. We flew all across China to reach a steel mill at Anshan just south of Mukden. We bombed those several times and we knocked a great deal of their coke producing capacity out. We lost planes and we lost men. We came back one day and we were in our briefing room. We always showed our missions on a large chart. And they had sheets over them. And on this particular day they had two sheets I was in there looking at that long sheet, checking to see where we were going today. I look up and they had a red string going from our base in China to the Japanese home island Kyushu (southern Japan). So we were the first Americans after the Doolittle Raid to hit the Japanese home islands.

The Japanese did not think we could make that long a mission. They couldn't do it so they didn't think we could either. We flew that mission and bombed Yawata, the largest steel mill in Japan. We lost planes and men on that raid too. Then we came back and flew down and bombed Singapore. When we invaded the Philippines we bombed the island of Formoso (now Taiwan). The Japanese had large air bases there.

We came back and so they asked us to bomb Singapore. That had been a British strong point in the Far East. The Japanese had taken it intact in 1942. There they had the largest repair facility for naval ships in the world. The Japanese were well using it. So they asked us to bomb it. On that mission we were in the air over 16 hours. We carried two 2,000 pound bombs. In Singapore harbor there was a large dry dock - the King George Drydock. We bombed it and our aiming point was the little control tower. When you knocked it out you knocked the drydock out of commission. We bombed it and we had excellent bombardiers. We had good men that made up the crews. We knocked out that drydock. And there was also a 320 foot ship in the drydock and we put it over on its side and put it out of commission.

Then they came back and asked us to bomb Palambang Sumatra. That was a large gasoline refinery where Japan was getting 85% of its aviation gas. As you know, no army can fight without fuel, especially in this time. The Japanese had to have that fuel. So we flew down to a British base on the little island of Ceylon. It only had one runway fit for our use. We had to take - off down wind. We took off and were 18 hours in the air on the mission. We bombed the refinery, and in dropping our bombs in the refinery, it caused a flash. You can imagine what it did to mile after mile of storage tanks. Some of our planes went in 100 feet over the river, where the river came up to the refinery and the Japanese tankers were docked there and they dropped mines in the river. This was the first time in the war that B - 29's were used to drop mines. The mine was a round object with very sensitive fuses all over it and explosives inside. You dropped it in the river and it would float along. The Japanese didn't realize they were there and their tankers would come up the river and they'd hit a mine and that would take care of the tanker. We were very successful with that.

We flew missions all over that part of the country there. We flew to Nansling, Swatow, Amoy, and places like that. We lost a lot of men. More were lost to mechanical problems than to enemy opposition. We had new planes and had to get the bugs out of them. We were new crews with new types of planes. Nobody could train us. We had more combat time than anybody in the area.

And one morning the major came skidding a corner in his jeep with the funniest look on his face. He said, "Get the boys out here." We imagined we were being volunteered for another rough mission for we were a lead crew. That is, we were the one who would go in first in a formation on a mission. The other planes would come in behind us. When we dropped our bombs every plane in that formation would drop their bombs at the same time. We would saturate the target. And doing that you could literally wipe the target out.

The major came up to us and said, "Boys, you're going to fly "Hump Happy Pappy" (a B -29) back to the States." We were chosen because we had more combat time, and because they had a special project for us. We took the old plane and found there were 128 holes in its side. The Japanese during the raid in China had dropped a fragmentation bomb down beside it and filled the plane with holes. It looked like somebody had fired a shotgun at the plane.

First off we tried to get the plane in running condition so we could take off. The bombbay doors had to be wired shut to keep them from opening. We worked on the engines. Finally the morning came to fly back to the States. You have no idea - it was like a reprieve from death for us. Out of and approximately 120 of us who started the tour, there was 16 - 18 of us left of the original crews who went over there. By attrition our numbers had really gone down.

We fixed the old plane up and had it ready to run. We were going to fly it all the way back to San Antonio, Texas. To me that was coming home. The morning we left everyone on the base came out to watch for we were the first combat men to head back for the States. The whole base turned out for us. We took the old plane and started up and got to the end of the runway. The tower gave us the green light, meaning take - off, you're clear to go. We pulled up about, 2,000 feet, everybody was waving at us and Major Koenig (the pilot) said, "Hang on boys, we're fixing to drag the runway." Can you imagine a plane 141 feet wide coming down a runway 30 feet off the ground while buzzing it. We came down and we buzzed that runway. The tower flashed the green light telling us to, "Go on, go on, go on." And we did. The colonel was on the runway in a jeep. We almost blew him out of the jeep. He made a very obscene gesture as we went by.

We flew all the way to Karachi. We didn't fly back like we went over. We flew from Karachi to where the Nile Rivers come together - The Blue Nile and White Nile at a place called Kartoum in Africa (the Sudan). From there we flew across the central part of Africa just below the Sahara Desert to Gold Coast on the African west coast. And I watched carefully on the ground. I wanted to see a herd of elephants. I never did but we saw lots of beautiful country. From there we flew across to Brazil to Natal on the extreme eastern coast of Brazil. We landed there and then flew on to a British base at British Guiana. Then we flew on to the United States, West Palm Beach, Florida. That was a beautiful sight. We flew over a city with the lights on. We had been used to having cities being blacked out.

We noticed they came out to spray our plane to get rid of any disease bearing insects. They came out before we even got off the plane. The customs people wanted to check us. Somebody had told them we had a monkey on the plane. We didn't. We had had a pet monkey but we had left her in India. They finally let us out of there and we flew the plane all the way back to San Antonio. Then we were off for 30 and then went on to the West Coast where they had a rest and recreation place (R & R). You usually stayed there a couple of months to get over combat fatigue. Then you were assigned to a new crew.

When I arrived there (the R & R place) to sign in there was a line of us. The radio operator (from before) was with me. I said, "I'm Sergeant Bob Beaty." They replied, "Mr. Beaty, wait a minute, don't move." I wondered, "What have I done wrong now." I was worried because I'd done a lot of wrong things and thought they were just catching up with me. They had a big red tag stuck on my name -- "Sgt. W.R. Beaty -- Earmarked Project H.L.K." I said, "I have my radio operator with me, Sergeant McKain." They said, "J.C. McKain?" We said, "That's right." So they told me, "Would you and Mr. McKain please step aside." We said, "Oh, Oh, they got both of us."

We were earmarked for that special project, "HLK." We were pulled out and sent back to Roswell, New Mexico. Just outside of Roswell was a place called Los Alamos. That's the place where the first atomic bomb was exploded. So we felt we were being pulled back to drop the atomic bomb for we were a lead crew, a special group. But they didn't have the bomb ready. So while looking around they put us in the Training Command. And then we went to Las Vegas where we trained the new crews before they went overseas. I was there until the end of the war.

In the meantime in the war in the Pacific, Americans had captured the Marianna Islands. This included Saipan, Tinean, and Guam. Guam was an old American base we had for a long time before it was taken by the Japanese early in the war. But then we got it back. The shooting had not ceased before we started building air bases there. And they built some of the largest bases in the world. The B - 29's started their raids on Japan from those islands. They would fly just to the coast of Iura Jima (an island closer to Japan). They began bombing their cities.

Japan was frailly built with few modern buildings. They had a lot of wooden buildings. The steel and stone buildings were in a minority there. So our boss, General Curtis Le May, who I had met before. He stayed in close touch and wanted to know how we did on our missions. He had lots of questions. Soon they had over a thousand B - 29's on those islands.

In Japan they had something we don't have here. The winds from 5,000 to 25,000 feet moved so fast, 300 miles an hour, you couldn't synchronize your bombing sight. You were going too fast. So General Le May sent the planes in at 5,000 to 7,000 feet, and loaded with incendiary bombs. In a short time, less than 12 months, they had bombed out over 80% of the industrial production of

Japan. They burnt their cities. And in doing this they saved us from having to invade the main islands of Japan. And all historians agree that the bombing of Japan into submission we saved over a million and a half casualties for the United States alone. And that doesn't count the Japanese who would have lost their lives. The Japanese were fanatical fighters who never gave up so it would have been a bloody invasion campaign. They had to be killed in a battle. Experience had shown that only one percent would surrender. And the civilian populace were armed with sharpened bamboo stakes in order to skewer the Americans.

So it sounds like a terrible thing when they came to drop the atomic bomb. The first one was dropped on Hiroshima and over 50,000 people were killed. The second one was dropped on Nagasaki, a large seaport town. It was protected by hills and valleys so there was not as much destruction. The atomic bombs gave Japan the option of saving face to surrender with honor by Emperor Hirohito. The day they signed the peace treaty on the battleship USS Missouri over 1,000 planes flew over as a show of force. So World War II was decided by air power.

We lost many men and planes but it was well worth it. We had the privilege of flying one of the greatest planes ever built, the B - 29. They were big 141 feet, 6 inches wide and 99 feet and 6 inches long. They were 29 feet lug at the tail. It was beautiful thing. I have no regrets as to my service.

The only thing I wish I had done was to take more pictures of some of the beautiful places I saw. I flew the Hump (the Himalayan Mountains) between India and China. I believe the Grand Canyon could have been hidden in some of the valleys I saw. Those mountains went up higher than we flew. They said they were 26,000 feet. We'd be flying at 28,000 feet and still have to look up to see the mountain tops. They were overseas with snow and were beautiful sight.

You came into China and you could see the people with their little hills all terraces to grow rice in. In India the cattle roamed the streets and the people wouldn't eat the cattle. That was because of the religious beliefs. In China I remember they used all available land, very little of it was lost for production. They didn't understand disease and lived with water pollution. We were afraid to eat their fresh fruits and vegetables. They would make you sick. We ate their peanuts and sugar cane safely. In India we had no eggs. All we had were powdered eggs from the United States. In China we got a big thrill, when we were given fresh eggs. The Chinese people were very much on our side. If you bailed out over territory occupied by the Japanese, the Chinese there would be ready to save you before you hit the ground. Entire villages were wiped out if it became known the people had helped American fliers escape. We had what was called CHIP bag which said in Chinese, "These are your friends, the American fliers. Help them get back to their base. The government of Chiang Kai - shek will give you a reward for this." Many died getting our boys out.

At the little cemetery out here at Antioch there is a boy named George

Williamson buried. His brother, Travis, flew planes in Europe. George was in my squadron. He bailed out over China and landed with a flashlight flag still in his hand. I don't believe I could have done that. George made it through the war. When the war was over they were flying mercy missions to supply Prisoners of War (POW's) using B - 29's. His plane crashed and he was killed then. Others from here flew in B - 29's, Jesse Le Blanc was one of them, and Walter Mauritzen, he was on our base in India. C B Marshall was on our base in India several times. So we ran into people from Texas.

The war was a horrible experience but I wouldn't take anything for having served in it. I love my country and people and by the grace of God I came through the war.

I have four battle stars for my Pacific Campaign Medal and two Air Medals. I had a recommendation for a Distinguished Flying Cross. None of those I earned by myself. We were a cross knot crew. They were great people. I still hear from many of them. And I was privileged just a few weeks ago to have a stranger drive up in my front yard and introduce himself by saying, "I'm John McKain." He was the radio operator I had flown with against the Japanese. I hadn't seen him in 45 years. It was a joy to see him.

I had a lot of what were called points to get the honorable discharge. The matron had been booming with a was economy. The first thing they wanted me to do was sign up for unemployment. I was too proud for that. So I began carpentry. I had worked for the railroad before I went in the military. Then an opening came up in Carthage in the Depot. And I was able to put in 40 years with the Santa Fe Railroad. I was married for 29 years and had one daughter. I had a divorce and married again, and my wife has spoiled me for the past 13 years. We have some wonderful grandchildren.

I have seen amazing changes during my lifetime. I have seen oxen hauling logs and hooked to carts. And I have seen man put his foot on the moon. I saw the plane I thought was the greatest ever become obsolete, and I saw the propellers taken off planes and jets come in. I came back after the war and realized the American dream, to have a home, and an automobile, and see the finest schools and medical care anywhere. I am so proud of our nation. I learned to appreciate these things during the war. When you face death on a daily basis your priorities change and do your values. You learn to appreciate each day. I'm almost 70 years of age now. I don't think of that being old yet. I pray that we won't have to fight another war.

I would like to close this conversation with a little quote I use sometimes about being true to yourself, family, friends, and God:

"The faults and deceit that you
bear in your heart,
Will never stay inside where it
first got its start
For sinew and blood
are a thin veil of lace,
What you wear in your heart
you wear on your face
If you play the game fair
and you stand on first base

You don't have to say so,
it shows in your face
But if your life is unselfish
and for others you live,
Not how much you can get,
but how much you can give,
And if you live close to God
and his wonderful grace
You don't have to say so
it shows on your face.

Loblolly staff who interviewed Bob Beaty - Seated, Ashley Wilkerson, and standing, Danny Weems and Mark Johnson.

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1. Crew of # 27s "Old Crackerty"

Front L to R - Lt. Harry Zembal (Nav), Lt. WE Sipes (Flt Eng), Maj. PA Kolein (Pilot), Lt. Jack Harnes (Co - Pilot), Lt. Harry Polansky (Bombardier). Back L to R - Sgt. Louis Di Laurenzie (L Gunner), Sgt. Joe W. Young (Tail Gun), Sgt. Robert Lovelace (R Gunner), Sgt. Bob Drake (CFC Gunner), SSgt. John Schaneck (Crew Chief), T Sgt. [illegible] (Radio Op). [illegible] [illegible], [illegible].

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Travis Williamson

Travis Williamson is a native East Texan who grew up here in the years before World War II. Compared to some of the others who we interviewed on their experiences in the war, he got something of a late start. But once Mr. Williamson got to Europe in late 1944 he managed to pack a lifetime of adventure into a period of a few months. His career since then had been primarily working with young people as a college administrator. In retirement he has not slowed down either. Travis Williamson had been the president of the Panola County Historical Foundation, and with his wife Helen, provide the dedication to make the Heritage Hall a reality for the preservation of Panola County history.

I was born in Tenaha, Texas on November 24, 1921. I was born in a house next to my Grandfather and Grandmother Pou where my mother was born. The house had been built for me to be born in. My daddy had swapped property with his brother - in - law for some other property and built the house. We lived there for three years then we moved to Panola County, next to where he'd been born. So we moved to the Antioch Community in 1925.

I went to Antioch Public School through the seventh grade and then I came to Carthage High School. I graduated in 1941. Immediately after that I went over to a college in Marshall, it was a two year Baptist junior college. This was the Fall of 1941 and went up to the attack of Pearl Harbor on December 7.

I immediately thought as to what I wanted to do in the war effort. My first idea was to get some special training and be an airplane builder. So I did. There was a place in Dallas that taught sheet metal for aircraft construction so I went there. I think it was called Southwest Aeronautics Training, or something. I finished the course and came home. I was there about ten days and got a call from North American Aviation. They wanted me to go to work in Hawthorn, California to help build B-25 bombers and P - 51 fighters. So I went back to Dallas and took a ten day North American training program. They were ready to ship me to California but I said, "Nope, I don't think this is what I need to do." So I came home and thought about it, and then gave them a call to get someone else for I was going back to school in Marshall. I entered the spring semester in March, 1942.

Then on April, 1942,, I went to Longview and visited with the Air Corps recruiter. He sent me to Tyler to take

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the test and I was sworn in that day. At that time they had what they called a "college deferral program." They had all the pilots they needed at the time, and the training schools were all filled up. So they told me I would get six to eight months deferral, and for me to stay in school. So I stayed longer, it wasn't until March, 1943 I was called to active duty.

I went to Wichita Falls, Texas, Shepherd Air Force Base, for Basic Training. I was there for however long the basic training took, then went to Austin College (Sherman, Texas) for Aviation Cadet Training. I caught the mumps and stayed 21 days in the hospital at Shepherd. Then I returned to Austin College to finish my training program and then was shipped to San Antonio, the Aviation Cadet Center. That was where we had all our ground school training-meteorology, aerodynamics, mechanics, mathematics, weather, and the other things. Then I was shipped out to Pine Bluff, Arkansas for Primary Training. We did our first flying in single engine aircraft and soloed for the first time. After the Primary Training I was sent to Basic Training at Independence, Kansas. There I flew the PT - 13, PT - 14, and PT 15. The PT - 14 was a North American plane much like the AT - 6 except the wheels didn't retract. We finished Basic at Independence and then went to Lubbock, Texas for Advanced Training. Then they decided if we would be fighter pilots of bomber pilots. Anyone over six feet automatically went into bombers. I was over six feet so I got two engine training. I flew AT - 19's, twin engine Cessna Trainers. I graduated in June, 1944 as a pilot and as a 2nd Lieutenant. I was in training over a year - the parts broke down into about three months each (ground school, basics, primary, advanced).

I was reassigned there in Lubbock as an instructor - pilot. The reason was they didn't have an overseas assignment open. I went home on furlough and bought a car and brought it back to Lubbock. I was and instructor - pilot there through October, 1944. I then received a B - 24 assignment and was to go to Lincoln, Nebraska to join my crew. From there we went to Boise, Idaho for overseas training. After that time of B - 24 training we went to Topeka, Kansas for our overseas assignment. Our orders were to go by ship and not to fly our own plane. So we went to Newport News, Virginia and that's where we shipped out from.

Fortunately we went on a French luxury liner refitted as a troop carrier. The food was fantastic. We had French chefs and waiters who knew how to serve. So that took a long time as we were in a convoy. We moved slowly and were interrupted by German subs several times. We had to zig - zag a lot. I think we were on the ocean over three weeks getting across to Gibraltar. It was interesting there as they had a complete gate across the Strait of Gibraltar to Africa, between the Atlantic into the Mediterranean. Most of the enemy subs were out of the Mediterranean and they didn't want anymore in there. So each time a ship went through they opened a gate and sent divers down to watch that no subs got through too. I had my 22nd birthday crossing the Mediterranean

Tate Edmondson (pilot), in middle, and crew gunners.

between Gibraltar and Italy. We finally got to Naples which had been bombed until shortly before we arrived. We used as a dock to leave our ship another ship laying on its side in the harbor.

We changed ships there and got on an English ship. The food was horrible. We had been spoiled on the French liner. But I did get a nice suite on one of the upper decks which was especially equipped. We went from Naples to the south end of Italy. We were on our way to Bari which was the headquarters of our unit. That's where we received our base assignments. We were part of the 15th Air Force. My unit then was the 456th Bomb Group and the 747th Squadron at

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Cerignola, Italy. This was just in from the heel of the boot in southern Italy. There were a lot of bases in the area, including many of which had been moved up from North Africa. E.B. Morrison of Carthage was an intelligence officer for the 455th Bomb Group near us. Their planes had the diamond tail markings on their planes and ours had the checker board. I did get in contact with E.B. while I was there.

On the 26th of December, 1944 on my third mission, we flew to Osviecim, Poland. It was one of our longer missions, and was a ball bearing, industrial target. I was shot down on my third mission, flying with Leon Bogue's crew on that particular mission. The bombardier of that crew was named Ted Knies and lives in Austin. On my next flight after this one we were together and were shot down again.

One the Osuviecim raid we lost two engines over the target from flak. We were instructed if we lost one or two engines, or had any mechanical difficulty, our only route to for escape was to head for Russia. There were a number of bases plotted in a path we could find as we flew east. Our first inclination after we lost the two engines over the target was to head for Russia.

So we had three fighter planes which left the main group to escort us. There were P - 38's there to protect the bombers. They stayed with us until we got to be about where we could find a friendly base then they left us on our own. They had to get home. But then three German ME - 109 fighters came buzzing in on us. Our right tail stabilizer was shot off. A 20 millimeter shell went through the middle of our fuselage and knocked out our communications. So we had no choice but to bail out of the plane.

We were up over a cloud cover so we didn't know exactly where we were. We started bailing out. The first pilot reached for his chute to get out of there. And his chute and his harness wouldn't match. That was an unusual occurrence but it could happen because in our locker rooms we had red chutes and red harnesses and blue chutes and blue harnesses. And you had better get a pair to match because you'd need to snap them on. They were a chest pack. He reached back and he had a red chute and a blue harness so he had two rings and no way you could snap them together. So he asked the engineer to go back to the emergency pack, in the rear of the plane. So he had to go through the bomb bay to get there, but brought back a seat pack. I was flying the plane at this time and fighting to keep it under control as we were flying with just the two engines out. One side of the plane wanted to turn over. So I was straining like anything to keep the plane upright while he was getting in his chute. I was what you call the co - pilot. I got everybody out and then let go of the controls and got to the bomb bay to get out myself. The plane was already beginning to roll over. I prayed to the Lord to get me out of there because once the plane was upside down there would be no way to get out. But I got out.

I had a pair of combat boots tied to my harness because in the airplane we were flying with electric boots and when you got to the ground you couldn't walk in them very well. So before I got ready to jump I got those boots our from behind my seat and tied them to the harness. The first thing after I jumped out I hit the slip stream from the airplane and those boots came up and hit me right in the face, and my helmet went off. But I figured I was at least out of the plane. I no more than got out of the plane and got the parachute open than I hit the top of a tree. So I was only 150 - 180 feet from the ground when my parachute opened. What I had thought was a cloud was only a ground of fog. Thus the plane hit the ground not far from where I landed.

Because of the adjacent noise from the crash, I knew people would be about looking for me. First thing after I hit the ground was to grab up my parachute and run into the woods some distance away and I thought it was hidden. I was in the woods and was aware of comings and goings and could hear gunfire. I said to myself, "I'm closer to the front line than I thought." So I reached down in my pocket and pulled out my escape pack. It was a plastic container about six by six inches and an inch deep. It fit into my pocket. I reached in to get my compass to see which direction to go. It was all fogged in so I didn't know from which direction the Germans were shooting from. I thought, this way I'll get some directions. So I got the compass out and looked at it. It was pointing north in one direction. I tried it again and it pointed to north in another direction. The compass was useless as it was demagnetized. So I thought my best escape was to get in the woods and stay in the woods. So that's where I headed.

I had been in the woods for awhile when I heard some whistling. I looked around and saw a woods road like in East Texas used as a wagon trail. I began to watch this old gentleman in a black coat, a black hat, and he was happy. We had been instructed by our intelligence that if we got shot down to never surrender to a young German. He'd run you through with a bayonet or gladly shoot or stab you. But if we had an opportunity we should try to find an older person.

So I walked out of the woods to intersect him as he was walking down the road. He was very happy and immediately reached in his coat and pulled out a bottle of vino to share with me. Of course I couldn't speak a word of Hungarian and he couldn't speak a word of English. I discovered later I was in Hungary, not too far from Budapest in the central part.

Well, I kept trying to talk to him and he kept trying to share his wine with me. As we went along I looked back over a field and I thought I saw somebody. Sure enough there were two men coming, and as they got closer I saw one of them had something under his arm. They were walking and the other one had an arm band on. They obviously were on my trail. I guess as I went through the grass, which was covered with like a hoarfrost, so I left an easy trail to follow. They got up closer and they waved and I waved back. They came up to us and were also Hungarians. I didn't speak the language but Tote Lazlo had a band on his arm which said, "Police." They were in like the Home Guard. I later learned he was a share cropper and lived with his family. His greeting was to come along with him to get fed and cleaned up.

So as we went along we passed several houses and they were homes of farm families who were very friendly.

Jackie Gleason (bombardier), Tate Edmondson (pilot), Travis Williamson (co - pilot)

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Everyone wanted to share their wine with me. I guess when I had first hit the ground was about 4:30 in the afternoon. So it was dark soon thereafter. Each one of the farmhouses meant a stop for none of them had seen an American before. I was an oddity. Then we got to Lazlo's house, he was a tenant farmer and where he lived with a family that included two children. There was teenager, and a little girl, Betty, eight or nine years old. Betty was dressed in a one piece wool suit. It was love at first sight. Betty sat down with me on the couch and she held onto my left arm. They brought some food in to me, and cleaned up my face.

From about 7:00pm when I arrived at their house until 1:30 the next day there would be a knock on the door about every fifteen minutes. A different family from the area just wanted to stop by and see me. They all seemed like very short people. I stood six inches taller than most of them. The men would come in and kiss me on each cheek and shake my hand. The ladies would nod and back up. Each time they would knock on the door, the ladies would vanish. They didn't know who might be coming - Russians or Germans. I kept asking who we were closer to, but they didn't seem to know.

This went on and I must have seen 50 to 60 families. The word got around so people just kept coming. Then about 1:30 there was a rap on the door, and there were three Russians standing there. I've never seen so many guns in all my life. They had been killing Germans all day and saved every pistol they found. They came in and they and my host and Betty and I were the only ones in the room. The only thing for defense I had was a trench knife. They looked at it and on it was printed "U.S. Air Force" so they were satisfied I was an American flier. There was a table about six feet long and they about covered it with the pistols they had captured. There must have been a dozen to fifteen Lugers and P - 38 pistols.

Well we visited a little bit and they convinced me I would be best off coming with them. So we got in their small car and I guess we drove for two and a half hours. We went through a number of guard posts where we had to stop and be checked. But we finally got to their headquarters and talked with their colonel and talked to him through a dictionary. He clapped his hands and a lady opened a door. He told her something and she brought in some fried chicken for breakfast. The sun was coming up by that time.

We talked for another 30 or 40 minutes and then some guards took me to a farm house where two other airmen were who had been picked up. There were three of us together then who had been shot down. We stayed with the Russians as they moved their headquarters two or three times. We were then on the outskirts of Budapest. And on about the 5th or 6th of January, 1945, Budapest fell to the Russians. We then were put on a truck, a U.S. Ford Truck part of the Lend Lease. The bed was loaded with about two feet of horse hides and cow hides that they were sending back to a shoe factory. All the time we were there we ate horse meat or cow meat, whatever they shot. They used an awful lot of horses with their army to move artillery and things. Almost every day we got a horse ham or shoulder.

The food was prepared in a big black pot on an iron stove. They kept it boiling around the clock. They never turned it off. They just added more meat or more vegetables to their stew. We ate off the country as we went through so whatever they found went into the pot.

Now when we got on the truck to leave they gave us a box with some food. It was bread which was Russian black bread. You had to saw on it to get a piece off. It was nutritional. So they packed the Russian bread and some salt pork - like middlings that you use to make bacon. We ate raw bacon and Russian bread for two or three days while we were on the truck.

We got down to the border between Hungary and Romania, right on the border. We were put into a hotel and gave us the first good meal I'd had had in several days.

It was a nice hotel. They had a string ensemble of older men who were good musicians. I recognized they could play lots of songs. I asked them to play "Indian Love Call" and they did. They started playing all kinds of American music after they discovered I was an American. Well in my escape pack there was $35 in money, gold certified so it was good as gold. So I sent $5 of that up to the band because they were performing so beautifully. So for the rest of the evening they gave me a concert. We had a good time.

The next day we got on a train which was the most loaded one I've ever seen. There were Hungarians going into Romania looking for work. People were inside the train and were hanging on the outside too. It took a few days to get to Bucharest. That was and experience. There was an Allied Mission there - for the Americans, French, English, and Russians. Those soldiers or airmen picked up on the Eastern Front were repatriated through there.

It was a very wonderful experience to see the U.S. Flag after being absent almost two months. I stayed in Bucharest for about ten days. The reason I stayed that long was the weather condition. We were snowed in. Normally they were making pick - ups every few days. But because of the bad weather they kept stacking us up there and we filled up the hotel.

I moved into a Catholic boys boarding school. It was in a compound thing with a fence around it. But I met some people there when I went out walking. I spent some of my money and bought a camera. I did some ice skating. I went to the theater. Bucharest was very French. I met a family there, and they invited me to their apartment. It was the first time I had been in a high rise apartment. We were up on about the fourteenth floor. I had rice with sugar on it for dessert. That was a first. I had had rice pudding, but not rice as a dish with sugar and cream on it. They had a dance for me and I got to meet a lot of the teenage and sub - teenage people. This young man who was my host was in medical school. It was and exciting experience to be there after the war had passed them by.

I did get to tour the Ploesti oil fields where we had bombed. There were dud bombs still in the field. I got to see that. I had trained under Colonel Kane, at Wichita Falls. They called him "Killer Kane." He lead the Ploesti Raid. They went in at corn stalk level. They found bits of corn stock stuck in the planes on their return. They went in and dropped their delayed action bombs and another squadron came in from the wrong direction and flew over low where the delayed action bombs were exploding. Several American planes were lost by the bombs dropped by Colonel Kane's squadron so that's how he got his name.

I got back to my unit in Italy finally. I went to Bari and got a three day rest leave. I flew about five missions. Actually I had flown about fourteen sorties. Are you familiar with the difference between a mission and a sortie? This time during the war all the missions we flew were of such distance that they changed the name from mission to sortie. And a sortie was once over the target. Earlier some of the missions if they were over three hours long it was a double mission, or if it was eight hours long it was a triple mission. So they changed that because they were sending crews back to the U.S. on the basis of only fifteen missions, or twenty or thirty. I think at this time you needed thirty sorties to complete your tour of duty.

I had enough so that I was on my fifteenth sortie. And we were over Prague, Czechoslovakia. That was our target. This was on the 25th of March, 1945. We were on the bomb run and the flak was thick and heavy. Immediately two engines went out. By this time the radar directed 88 millimeter anti-aircraft guns of the Germans was

Travis Williamson (co - pilot) and Ed Vals (navigator)

terrific. It was a heavily guarded target. With two engines out we immediately jettisoned out bombs. Again we headed for sanctuary in Russia.

We had been going a good 45 minutes and according to the maps we had we were

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beyond the Eastern Front and over Russian territory. We located an airfield and fired the appropriate signal by flare and got the correct signal in return which meant it was a friendly base. We turned around to head in and looked up. There must have been 100 German ME - 109 fighters up in the sky around us. We had no choice as they fired in from of us and flew across our path. We landed at the air base with three propellers feathered which meant we were flying on one engine. We got to the end of the runway and by the time the plane stopped we were surrounded by German soldiers. It was like we were in the middle of an explosion of people.

This German colonel with a monacle in his eye came up. He must have been about five feet six inches. He walked up to me with a pistol with a barrel you could stick your thumb in. I'd never seen anything like it. It was like a 410 shotgun. He goosed me with that pistol in the stomach about three times, and said, "If that plane blows up I'll kill you." His English was as good as mine. I said, "We have already detonated the Norden bomb sight and jettisoned our bombs so there's nothing else." He replied, "But if this plane blows up we kill you."

At this particular time I was wearing a Colt .45 pistol under my arm. They took that and my watch and anything else of value. They took us into their prison compound. Our first food was limburger cheese. I had never even smelled that before. I got a whiff of that stuff, and said, "I don't know if I can ever eat that." So I had a silk scarf I had torn off my chute from the earlier time I had bailed out. I took the scarf off and wrapped the cheese in it and stuck it in my clothes away from my nose. Well, you know about the third day that cheese tasted pretty good as we hadn't gotten any other food. The Germans didn't have much.

On the third day the Germans put us on a train and were being sent to Nuremberg where the interrogation center was and the prison camp we'd be in was there too. Well, it took us several days

Travis Williamson by his B - 24

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because we could only travel at night because American fighters kept shooting up the engines if they appeared in the daytime. And the bombers were going after the tracks. So they'd repair the tracks as they could and move us at night. And they were using Polish and Russian women as their slaves working on the railroads. We would be stopped two or three hours during the night while they repaired the track. These women would come along to work. They were big ladies carrying cross ties on their shoulders. The train would move up as they fixed the tracks.

We finally ended up n Vienna; spent some time there. The only time I've been in jail was there when we had to stop over. Then we got on the train up to Nuremberg. We got there and they put us in solitary confinement for ten days. Everyday they'd call us out and ask for information. So I'd just give my name, rank, and serial number. They'd kick your shins and fuss at you and send you back to your cell. The interrogators knew more about me and my squadron than I knew. They knew everything, and they just wanted me to confirm it.

One interesting thing is I've seen movies since the war on Germans. And the movies have never been able to duplicate the madness that was demonstrated by these people in their allegiance to Hitler. That even includes the ones I talked to. Man, you talk about clicking your heels and giving the Hitler salute. We just can't duplicate the reality.

On several occasions I was able to visit with some of the elite German fliers. They were interested in our equipment and tactics. They were interesting to talk to. Their English was just as good as mine. Some had been educated in the U.S.

So I went from the interrogation center to a regular prison camp, also in Nuremberg. Then our forces crossed the Rhine River. According to the Geneva Convention we were not supposed to be within 50 miles of combat, so they turned us loose. We marched to Munich and then down to Mooseburg. I was there for a short time. The Red Cross kept us alive. Once a week their trucks would park by the road and distribute food packages, one for each two of us. We stretched that food. Also we robbed the German barns we passed for eggs, chickens, apples, potatoes. Then when we got to the other prison the food supply was short. The Germans didn't even have food to feed themselves. I was a P.O.W. (prisoner of war) for about 45 days and lost 40 pounds. In looking back we were lucky the Germans did share their food with us. Part of the reason they did was they knew the war was over well before it was over. They couldn't move their vehicles. They were out of fuel. They were using wood chips to run trucks. Their planes were stuck on the ground with no gas. They destroyed some of their own planes because they couldn't use them. Then in May, 1945 the war in Europe ended.

In June, 1945 I flew out of Europe back to the U.S.A. Then I went to the University of Texas and was a college administrator for 30 years. I was the Dean at Panola, and at Centenary, and the evening college at Kilgore.

Now, in total, I flew 35 missions. I had several other shorter missions that weren't counted. I received a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), and the Air Medal with two clusters. Normally you received and Air Medal after five missions and, and a cluster for each addition five. When I was awarded the DFC it was a posthumous award as I was Missing in Action (MIA) at the time. It went to my mother as "next of kin."

As I said, I returned to the U.S. in June, 1945. I was to be reassigned in Florida. My assignment was to be schooled to go to the Pacific. I was to fly the Douglas A - 26, and improvement over the older A -20 and B - 26.

Well, during that time, my older brother (George) who had been flying with the 20th Air Force, flying B - 29's out of India against Japan, got transferred to Tinian Island. That was in the Pacific closer to Japan. Then he was assigned back to Edwards Air Force Base in California for some special training. While he was there he got to come home on leave so we got to visit as I was on leave too. I was telling him of the war in Europe and he told how things were in the Pacific. He said, "I can't tell you what I'm going to do but you'll know about it." Well, if they had dropped a third atomic bomb, his crew would have dropped it. That was the training they got at Edwards. So then his group was flying mercy mission into Japan with the war over. They were dropping supplies into P.O.W. camps. His crew was shot down and they were all killed. The Japanese who did it supposedly didn't know the war was over. My brother was buried in Japan near where he went down. After the war his body was returned here and he war buried in Antioch Cemetery. I was a first lieutenant and he made captain before being killed.

I had a younger brother also who was in the Navy. He was on a cruiser at the fighting around Okinawa. On two or three occasions the Japanese Kamikaze suicide planes came in on his ship. When the war was over, my mother had been through a tough time. George had been reported missing in action earlier after his plane crashed. I was missing in action twice. Then he got killed right when the war was over.

I got married in November, 1946. I had met Helen when we were chemistry partners at the college in Marshall before I went off to war. We wrote during the time I was in the service. After the war I was ready to go to Baylor after getting out of the Air Corps in San Antonio. On my way to Waco I stopped in Austin to see an old roommate. Helen was also at the University of Texas. They both convinced me I didn't need to go to Baylor. So I joined them in Austin. A year later we were married.

Looking back to what we went through it was something. The German flak was tough. The guns were in four gun batteries and they'd hook them up with the radar. They'd put a group of the batteries together as they wanted. When you were going to bomb a target you'd need to line up on it from an I.P. (Initial Point) to get a straight run in on the target. It seemed like thirty minutes to cover the distance but actually it was only three to five minutes. The bombardier needed that straight run. And on that path is where you'd find the flak. The Germans lined up their guns on your expected path.

The German fire was accurate. The radar helped on the altitude and speed and the wind was considered. The first burst would be under your nose, and the next one under one wing. And you knew the next one was going to be right on you. The thing that got the engines was the flak (shrapnel) from the shells covered a big area. It didn't take much to puncture an engine.

German fighters didn't bother us much. We had our own good fighter escorts to keep the Germans away. Our P 51's and the P - 38's sheltered us. The only time had trouble was when we were on our own alone and then German fighters shot us down. That ME - 109 was good though. That 20 - millimeter cannon in the nose could tear you up. The 30 caliber guns in the wings were less of a problem. If they'd had .50 caliber machine guns like our fighters they would have to be a tough foe.

The German anti - aircraft guns we had trouble with were the 88, 105, and 140 millimeter. They had ten times the number of the 88's than the others. If you got over one of their really fortified areas you could tell when they had the 105 and 140 millimeter guns. The 88 created a black burst in the sky, the 105 was white, and the 140 was yellow. They were radar directed as I said. Those 88's created black clouds you just had to fly through.

Our efforts to bomb Germany was effective and worth the price, I believe. The industry and fuel supplies were crippled. The air battle helped win the ground battle and shortened the war.

I was with the Russians for over a month. I was impressed with them. They knew more about Texas than I knew about Russia. They knew I was a cowboy right off. They were good, common folk. They were in a war because they had to be there. They were anxious to get back to whatever they were doing and get back to their families. They could really party but they were fierce soldiers. They needed more and better equipment than they had. But they could fight well with what they had. Their army was less mechanized than ours. I received a broad education on them in a short period of time. I learned much of war and people in general during my time in World War II.

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Jack Bowen

Jack Bowen was another young East Texan who went off to the 8th Air Force. He went to England as a member of the ground crew programmed to keep the bombers in the air. But when the opportunity came, Jack Bowen switched to flying status as a gunner on a B - 17. This love of flying led him into a time of adventure and horror that he never believed possible. However, he did survive to go on to a career in the Air Force after World War II and finally a return to Panola County with his wife, Lucille. And they now have five grown children and a growing number of grandchildren and great - grandchildren.

I was born in Texarkana, Texas on July 19, 1923. My mother and father were Mr. and Mrs. J.E. Bowen. They were both from Panola County. My mother was born in Hallsville and moved to Panola County. My dad was born in Rock Hill. He went to school in Center. They used to have a business college there and he graduated and went to work for the Santa Fe Railroad in Beckville as the Depot Agent until 1905. I think it was then he went to work for the Texas Company. He worked for Texaco in Texarkana until 1931, and in 1931 we moved from Texarkana to Carthage. Then I grew up here and went to school here, and graduated from high school in 1941.

The fact as to how I got into the military was playing football here. Some of us on the team had been listening to the war news from Europe, before the U.S. was in the war, in 1939. We had this on our mind. I enlisted when I was 17 and went to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri. And from there I went to Denver, Colorado. I went to Lowry Base where they had the Armament School where you learned about weapons, bombs, fuses, and such things. And I spent nearly a year there going to school. From there I went to California - McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, and was there when Pearl Harbor happened in 1941.

We were then issued clothes for the South Pacific, and we figured that's where we would be going to fight. At the last minute a change of plans came through and they shipped us to Fort Hamilton, New York. And we shipped out from there in April, 1942, going to England.

I was in the Army Air Corps. At the time there was no separate Air Force. I had been in the Civilian Training Corps in 1938 and 1939 down in San Antonio. One month out of the year you'd go to an Army base and they'd train you for officers Training. I had been in that and decided I didn't want any more of the marching, walking, or carrying the rifle. So that's the reason I went in the Air Corps. I did that training in San Antonio during the summer while I was still in school. They paid your transportation to get there - I can remember it was $19.05 on the train. But we didn't get any pay while we were there for the month. If you went four months (over four years time) you got a commission. But I only had a chance to go two years before I joined the military in 1941. Also the Air Corps had better things to be trained in to besides learning how to shoot a rifle.

So I became an armorer as part of the ground crew, and only later became a gunner on a bomber. An armorer works on all the weapons on the aircraft. You'd service them and load the ammunition and the bombs (fuze and load them). So when I got to England I was on the ground crew doing all that. I was stationed in England atBassingbournwith the 91st Bomb Group, 401st Bomb Squadron. We flew B-17 bombers.

While I was in the ground crew I phased into becoming a gunner. I did the training for that while I was in England. We did practice flying to do aerial gunnery. I became an armorer - gunner. I was the ball - turret gunner but was also responsible for maintaining all the weapons on our plane. I had always wanted to fly and when they got short of crews, well then I got my chance. In 1943 they started to take anyone they could get.

I had first gone to England in April, 1942 with the first contingent of Americans to go to England. I went to there base at Molesworth first where the first American planes to raid over Europe flew from. They had some old Boston Havocs, twin engines. They flew just a token raid to let them know we were there. I stayed there until I went to the 91st Bomb Group. It was quite famous for its accomplishments. We had the highest total of enemy aircraft shot down for any Bomb Group - 402, and we also had the highest losses. And on the first raid by B - 17's against Germany, our Group's planes were the only ones to reach the target that day.

For myself, I started flying on missions in late 1943, September or October. I was a member of the crew of the "Ramblin Wreck." The pilot had gone to Georgia Tech. All B - 17 crews were made up of ten men. They day I was shot down was February 21, 1944. On that day we weren't flying our aircraft. That's because on the previous day we had a rough mission where we'd had two engines shot out, and the stabilizer blown off. We were lucky to get back and land it. So the next day we were supposed to "stand - by" and not fly a mission.

But they came in the morning of the 21st about 2:30 to get my crew up before the briefing as to the mission. When the fellow shook me, I said, "Hey, I', not supposed to fly. You get somebody else, we've had our turn." He said, "No, you're going to have to go as the crew of this other airplane." So our plane that day was "Lightning Strikes" which showed and outhouse with a bolt of lightning hitting it with Hitler running out with some toilet paper in his hand. That's how the plane got its name.

Well anyway, we got up at 2:30 and you'd go down to the hanger and put your parachute and get your oxygen mask; and take off your rings, watches, and everything out of your pocket. This was so you couldn't be identified or for security reasons. Then we left from there and went to the mess hall an eat breakfast. About 3:45 a.m. we'd get back to the briefing room. In the briefing room they'd have a map close to twenty feet long. There would be a big cover over it. When they got ready to start the briefing they'd roll the cover up. And there would be a string attached to Bassingbourn (our base) to somewhere in Europe (where we were to fly that day). We always anticipated about the string, as to how long it would be told us how long we would be in the air.

The day I got shot down we figured the mission was going to be a snap. The route was across the English Channel, then across to Luxenburg, and right into Munster, Germany. Munster was just over the border. We said, "Man, this is short. We've got it made today." But when we got over there we found that they knew that we were coming. I think they had every anti - aircraft gun in Germany lined up on us that day. They shot down eight of out twelve aircraft. Ours was the eighth one to go down. Our squadron lost 80 men that day, ten to each bomber.

My crew assignment as I said, was as the ball turret gunner. I weighed 175 pounds at the time and at 5'8'' in height, it wasn't bad for me. Still you flew in a ball with your legs up above and holding the control handles for the guns, you could get stiff after a few hours. You had no facility for going to the bathroom. Later on they put in a relief tube so you could go to the

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bathroom, but when I was flying we didn't have that. In fact the oxygen masks we used were the old "A - 9's." We had to use balloons with them, and your saliva would go down into the balloons or bag as you breathed in and out would freeze into solid ice. So we had to carry extra masks to take one off when it froze up, we would have another to put on. You entered the ball turret from inside the airplane. You had a little hand lever that you cranked to open/ the lid, then closed it back after you got in. Then you turned on the automatic starter and everything was controlled by the throttles as to the turret and its guns.

I was shot down on my fifth mission. I flew the first four on "Ramblin Wreck" and the last one on "Lightning Strikes." Lightning struck on that 1st mission. We first got jumped that day by a bunch of German fighters, ME - 109's and FW-190's. We first got hit by flak, our number four engine, an outboard one on the right side, and it tore plumb off the airplane. When it did, it caused us to pull up out of the formation. We were heading over the target at the time. Then we went into a dive. I didn't think any of us would get out as I didn't think the pilot would be able to pull the plane out of the dive. He finally leveled the airplane out long enough for us to get out. He got out himself with 30 seconds to spare.

After we got hit by flak, the fighters had jumped us again too. I thought we were going to get a little relief but that didn't happen. I thought we might get to Switzerland, a neutral country. But we didn't have a chance when the fighters jumped us when we were by ourself out of the formation. There was strength flying in a formation. For B - 17's were so built and designed that you had fire power in any diction as long as you had a group of them flying together in a formation. The squadron flew in such a way that a German fighter would get shot up if he went into the formation. We had to fly in formation for protection because we didn't have fighter escorts to guard us against the German fighters. That came later in mid 1944. The only escorts we had took us just across the English Channel to the coast of France. After that we were on our own and had to fight our way through, in and out. Now later when they got the long range P - 51's the bombers had many fewer losses to the German fighters.

So I was shot down on the 21st of February, 1944. From the ball turret I looked up and saw the smoke and fire coming through the bombbay. There was a lot of noise and racket. Finally the pilot hit the "bail - out" button (that rang a bell in my turret). I got up into the plane and tried to get out the forward compartment but the door was jammed, so I had to crawl back to the tail section. I got half - way out of the hatch and got stuck with my parachute. My buddy in back of me put his foot on my back and pushed me out of the plane and I was free of the aircraft. I didn't count to ten or anything. I had never used a parachute and had any training. Everybody, ten of us, got out of the plane. We landed not too far out of Munster. I hit a building coming down, about two stories up. I was partly unconscious, the impact knocked me out. When I came to this fellow was standing over me with a pistol in my face. I knew he had to be Gestapo because of his wearing a swastika and leather britches, black hat, and all this and that. He had the gun in my face and said one thing in English - "FOR YOU THE WAR IS OVER." And that pistol barrel looked like a shotgun pointed right between my eyes. It was a *P - 38 pistol.

They captured us all. The crew was pretty well scattered. I was injured, having broken the small bone in my lower left leg. I tried to get up but couldn't. The Germans were yelling and hollering. Finally our radio operator appeared and he picked me up and carried me. So they took us on in. The officers went to one camp, and us enlisted men went to another camp. The radio-operator and I were taken into Munster.

I don't know if you've ever seen these movies or not of people in dungeons, chained up on a rack with long grey beards. They took us down in a dungeon. I mean a dungeon! We wound down to the bottom of some stairs and he and I just got hysterical. I was just eighteen. I think closing the door with us in a little cubby - hole with a board folding down to sleep on seemed funny. I looked at him and he looked at me and we just started laughing. I guess they thought we were crazy.

We stayed there about two days. And my leg got to bothering me real bad. They took me up to what they called a hospital. The doctor felt on my foot, and said, "Kaput." I figured he meant it was broken. He put some regular tissue paper wrapped around the leg and some plaster. He didn't set it or anything.

I then left.

We went to what we called Dulag Luft. They put us on a train in Munster and we went from there to Frankfurt - on - Main. Dulag Luft was the interrogation center. They put us in little cells by ourselves with no lights, no windows, no nothing. There was just an opening in the door where they could slide food in to you. They would take us out one at a time and interrogate us. We had been told not to give our name, rank, and serial number. We went through this process. They took me in one room and a German was interviewing me. He told me, "You might as well tell me everything. That man over there is telling everything in the world. You can listen if you don't believe me." He opened the door and I could hear someone talking in the next room. We had been told a lot of times the Germans would do this as a ruse that is, if your buddy talks, you might as well talk too.

The German that interviewed me was from Detroit. He said he graduated from the University of Detroit. He spoke fluent English. His English was better than mine. He kept talking to me. He's use a sweet approach, then he'd get mad. Sometimes somebody standing behind you would hit you on the side of the head if they didn't like your answer. This went on for ten or fifteen minutes. Then he told me they didn't need any information from me as they already had what they needed. He told me what Group and what Squadron I was from. He knew who our Group commander was. The way they gathered intelligence from was a little here and a little there. Then they'd put it all together. He had books on shelves, and I'm serious, from floor to ceiling about twenty feet long, with books on different Groups and Squadrons. I'd never seen such a gathering of intelligence in my life. Finally I was put into a detention cell alone for eight or ten days. That's because I wouldn't tell them information. There were no lights and I was fed bread and water through the slot in the door.

Finally they got me out as well as a few others being held there. They put us on a train and we went to Lithuania. To get from Frankfurt we had to go through Berlin. Well, we got to Berlin one afternoon. And about the time we're there, the RAF (British) came over on a bombing raid. We were right out in the marshalling yards. The guards jumped out and locked the boxcars which are smaller than those in the U.S. They were called "40 and 8" meaning they held "40 men or 8 horses." They took off and left us to the bombers. When the bombing raid was over, as we discovered the next morning, our boxcar was the only one left around us. There were 30 or 40 of us in that boxcar. How we survived I'll never know for they destroyed most of the marshalling yards.

But they got us out of there and on to another train. They took us east through the Polish Corridor and on into East Prussia and to Lithuania. We got to Memel, and outside of Memel, about eight miles, there was a place called Heydekrug. We were there at the prison camp, Stalag Luft VI, from February, 1944 until July, 1944 when the Russians broke through and captured Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. They cut the Germans off so they evacuated us by sea. There's a lot about the trip I don't like to talk about. But things were bad enough that they became part of the atrocity stories taken to the War Crimes Commission.

But anyway, they evacuated us by cattleboat from Memel (Lithuania) through mine fields, and we came into Swinemunde in northern Germany on the Baltic Sea coast. We got there and they got us off the boat. They carried us about forty miles on another train until we got to a place called Grosstychow. We got off the train there, but knew that something was wrong. Things were getting pretty rough. This one captain in the German army was shouting and screaming. They had handcuffed us all. He lined us all up and made us run two miles from the station to our new prison camp. We had guys with legs gone, arms gone, crippled, shot, blind, and burned. You name it, we had it. And they got behind us with bayonets on each side of the road. They had big dogs running along. It was a hard run. We had guys get cut up, dog bitten, beat up. But we made it out there anyway. What Intelligence determined later was the Germans wanted us to make a break for it to escape because they had machine guns set up on each side of the road. They were just going to kill us all.

Somehow we survived. We stayed in that camp, Stalag Luft IV, from July, 1944 until February 4, 1945. Then the Russians started coming close again moving from the East toward Berlin. Then from February 4 to May 8, 1945 we were constantly on the road. One fellow kept track of the miles we walked and it was over 1,000 miles. We slept in the snow, had filthy clothes, no shoes and wrapping our feet in rags. People lost one or both legs. It was a death march. We lost 300 - 400 men out of 1,200 from that one camp.

So on February 4, 1945, we evacuated Luft IV. We force marched in the midst of one of the worst winters there in many years in north Germany. The suffering by frostbite was pitiful. Guys lost toes, feet, their legs. We all had dysentery, diarrhea. We had a flight surgeon that had bailed out over Germany in order to get into a P.O.W. camp to try to take care of the prisoners. He was with us but couldn't get any medication. He would have us take wood when the Germans would let us, and burn it. And we would eat the charcoal to try to stop the dysentery and diarrhea. But you couldn't stop it. The only water you drank was polluted water. When you drank water it was out of trenches, or you'd eat ice or snow. You had to drink even if there was nothing to eat. You can't live without water. We drank out of everything so we caught every disease in the world. We were fortunate to keep alive.

So we kept wandering. The doctor had gotten some cigarette paper and kept a record of our travels. He later gave evidence to the War Crimes Commission. His statement read in part: below page. He kept a daily log as we went from one place to the next. It was really 980 something miles. And in the shape we were in that's a long way to walk. We walked from February 4 until May 8, 1945 when the war was officially over. We had no permanent camp. We were sleeping in ditches, sleeping in fields, wherever we stopped for the night. If we were lucky we'd sleep in a barren field

Q - What were the conditions on this march as regards drinking water?

A - It was common for the men to eat snow whether it was dirty or not. At other times some men drank from ditches that others had used as latrines. I personally protested this condition many times.

Q - What medical facilities were available on the march from Stalag #4?

A - Blisters became infected and many men collapsed from hunger. Wherever our column went, there was a trial of bloody movements and discarded underwear.

In May we saw lots of explosions from shells one night. About midnight or one o'clock in the morning it all quit. Everything got dead quiet. We were right in between the two opposing sides. They were each firing over us. When it got quiet we knew something was up. The next morning we woke up and started looking around. The only guards that were left were the ones who had been half - way decent to us. The ones who had been cruel had left. They were long gone.

We looked up on a hill and saw a half - track coming. There were troops on the top of it and they were flying the Union Jack (English flag). We knew we were finally free. They came in and issued each one of us a rifle and a double bandoleer of ammunition. We were supposed to go back across the line 50 miles to a place called Luneburg. I was crippled up and so were a lot of others. We commandeered wagons, oxen, horses, bicycles to get us to Luneburg. The rifles were to protect us because there were still a lot of snipers around.

We'd come into a town from one side and the citizens would leave from the other side. We did look pretty bad. You can imagine what we looked like carrying rifles, with bandoleers across our chests, with long beards, not too clean. We finally got back to Luneburg. We were actually liberated by the British at Zarrentin. That was just across the Elbe River.

To "D" Lager
#2
#2
Head

Prison Camp - Stalag Luft IV - roll call as seen from a guard tower.

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When we were liberated we looked and saw a whole German division trying to get across the Elbe River. The British had it blocked off. The Germans were trying to get away from the Russians. They were scared to death of the Russians. The way they had treated them they knew what the Russians would do to them. The Germans got to jumping into the river to get across and it was big, wide, and cold.

There were Russian P.O.W's who were liberated with us were given rifles as well. But they had to take those rifles away from them. They were killing German civilians - men, women, and children. They were raping women and little girls. British finally took the rifles back and put them all under arrest. They just went crazy. I thought there was going to be another war right there.

So we got back to Luneburg. There was a grass field there with airplanes going in and out for ex - P.O.W.'s and others. We almost had an international incident when we got there. There were about 700 of us ex - P.O.W.'s and we hadn't eaten a real meal in a month. And the British wouldn't share their supper or give us anything to eat. I figured they could do without one meal. If it hadn't been for their colonel I think there would have been a fight there. We were getting ready to fight and he came in and gave a long speech about cooperating and quieted people down. So we spent the night there sleeping on the grass. The next morning the airplanes came in. They flew us out. I went into Brussels, Belgium and I was in a hospital there for a week or ten days. From there I went to Camp Lucky Strike (in France) and then got to New York. I was at Camp Kilmer for a week or so.

Then they sent me on down to San Antonio. In fact they sent 350 of us there. They placed us on convalescent leave. It was probably in June, 1945 before we got to San Antonio and got released. I went back to Miami Beach and that's where I was separated before I re - enlisted. I went back in and finally retired from the Air Force. I retired as a Master Sergeant in 1958. I got a disability retirement because of World War II injuries.

From my World War II service I was awarded the Air Medal. I received a French medal for the liberation of France. I received the Prisoner of War Medal. Then I received several campaign medals for the time I was in and when I served.

The B - 17 bomber was the best plane ever made for the job it had to do. It could take a heck of a beating. The day before I was shot down - on the "Rambling Wreck" we had a stabilizer shot off, lost two engines, had to crank the landing gear down by hand - and we made it back to the base. The damage was from flak and from fighter attack. I thought we were going down that day. We were lucky to get back. I've seen the B - 17's come in with whole sections gone. One got rammed by a German fighter right forward of the vertical stabilizer and the plane held together. I think it was the best made for that time. They set it up so they could fly the daylight missions without fighter escort and still survive. The B - 17's had to depend on each other. To me the German fighters were the big problem. You could drop the foil to fool the radar - directed anti - aircraft guns and their flack.

But we had the firepower on the B - 17's to survive even the German fighters. The German fighter's guns were good up to 600 yards and ours were for 1,000. So we had 400 yards to get them before they got inside their range. We had our guns sighted to take advantage of our longer range. To go for their fighters wasn't like shooting clay pigeons. Those suckers moved and flew by us with their armor protected bellies showing. But we got armor piercing and incendiary shells and when we hit them it would go through their armor and set the planes on fire. I shot down four of their fighters and the whole crew got a total of nine. We gave them a good battle.

The day we got shot down (the next day) we got jumped by the fighters after we got out of the formation. When we saw we weren't going to make it, the pilot lowered the landing gear. That was an international sign of distress. Most air forces recognized this. Just as soon as we dropped out our gear - there were two German fighters coming up and they came up along side us and boxed us in. They tipped their wings in a salute and took off. Of course they radioed our position to the ground so they were ready to capture us when we got down.

The Luftwaffe (German air force) had a lot of respect for us and we did they weren't Gestapo SS types. I didn't meet those types until I was a P.O.W. In fact I was captured when I couldn't walk. I was sitting with another P.O.W. who had been burned. He had newspaper to cover him. His eyebrows were gone as were his nose and ears and he just had a scar for a month. He was really in pain. This Luftwaffe officer came through and spoke to us. He spoke pretty good English. He sat down and gave us a cigarette. He outranked the guards. I don't know what he told them. I couldn't understand German much then. Whatever he told them they got off his back. He gave us cigarettes (four of us). What I am saying there was an understanding between opposing sides at times.

The SS and the Gestapo gave us the hard times as P.O.W.'s They were mean. The young Germans were often fanatics and were tough too. I was interviewed after the war as to some of their atrocities by the War Crimes Commission. A lot of the information was for the Russians for a lot of the crimes I saw took place in areas they came to control. They also asked me what I thought of the Russians. There were some of their P.O.W.'s with us and you had to watch your food when they were around. Normally P.O.W.s would never steal from each other. That was a cardinal sin. In fact we had one guy in a camp I was in who stole somebody's bread. He was ostracized, nobody ever spoke to the man again. You couldn't allow stealing for people's lives depended on what little bit they had.

These Russians were bad about that. You had to hide any food you had inside your clothes. They'd steal what they could. I told the War Crimes investigators this but they had good people too. One time another fellow and I had been really sick. And there were a bunch of Russians who had been working on a farm. They saw us and took us into a little shack and they fed us and quite a few others in our group. I told this story of Russian kindness to the investigator but he wasn't too interested to hear anything positive. I told him he'd have to hear the good as well.

I know the Allies tried to get the Germans who abused the P.O.W.'s but I don't know what happened. I know they were after that Capt. Pickhardt who was responsible for the atrocities when we were going to Stalag Luft IV. He was the commandant and hated Americans. He was S.S. He was on the War Crimes Commission to go on trial, but I don't know if they ever found him.

A Day in Prison Camp and P.O.W. Memories

About 6 o'clock every afternoon the Germans would come in and lock the doors to your quarters, to each barracks. Now in Luft VI the barracks was built on the ground. But in Luft IV, more typically, the barracks were built up off the ground. In that way the Germans could look to see if anyway was hiding there.

Anyway, they'd come in and lock the doors, and then they'd turn the guard dogs loose in the compound, with in the barbed wire areas and among the barracks. And they also had guards walking in the compounds at night. Those were big old dogs, so if you got out of the barracks they'd eat you up.

Our beds consisted of what we call excelsior, like a tow sack filled with wood shavings. And you had five slats to lay that tow sack mattress on. It was lumpy. And the cots were triple deck. The cots were attached to the walls around the room in the barracks, with space on one wall for the door. We had over 30 men in each room, living, sleeping, and eating.

Then in the morning they'd come around and unlock the doors. They'd get the dogs out of the compound. They'd open the doors before daylight. They had a toilet thing down at the end of the room. It was like a tim bucket that had to be emptied everyday. And during the day we'd go down to what was called the "waste house."

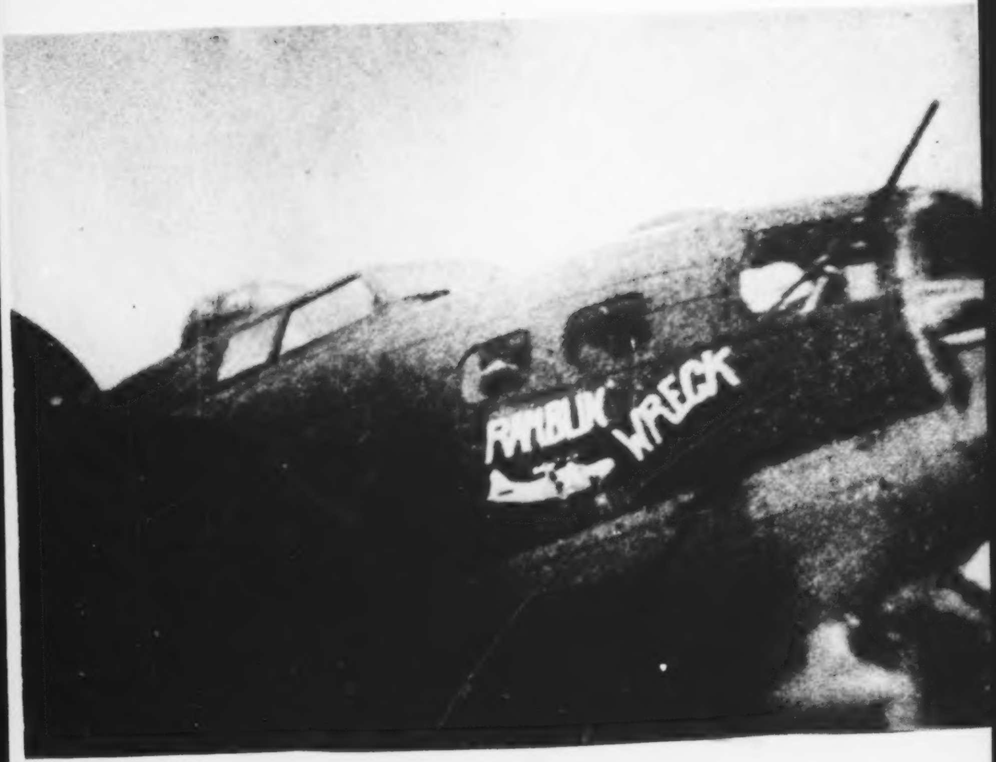
We couldn't actually leave the barracks until it got light. Then we could go down to where there was a long trough with faucets and we'd wash and get cleaned up some. We didn't have razors at that time. I had a pretty good size beard. Most people did have beards. We had what we called two meals a day. In the morning, I guess it would be about nine o'clock, after everybody got up and got everything taken care of, people would be up and moving around. We had what was called a mess hall which was up at the top of the "lager" or compound/ We had about a three gallon bucket that we use to go up there to get "ersatz." This was coffee made from acorns.

For breakfast we had the ersatz and a ration of bread. We got a loaf of bread for seven men for a week. That's how much bread there was. Now if you take a typical loaf of bread, you'd have to cut it seven ways. And each piece would have to last for a week. So you could see why it was imperative that nobody could steal from a fellow prisoner.

And then they would give us what they called "swine potatoes," which were small potatoes like they fed the hogs. They'd boil them. That would usually be our second meal of the day - ersatz coffee and boiled potatoes. Sometimes we have a vegetable which was like a cross between a pine cone and a turnip or a cabbage or something. It was horrible but at least it was life sustaining. We didn't have any meat.

Believe me, it was quite a problem in serving the food. You'd go up there to the mess hall to get your food. And then you had to have a room leader, which I was from my particular room, had to sit there and divide to each man in that room exactly what he was supposed to get. And they all would sit there and watch you to be sure nobody got an ounce more than they got. So what I finally wound up doing, with so much complaining, was to make a policy that each would have a turn to pass out the food. So if there was any griping, it was done at each other and not just at me. That's they way we split our food. So one person went down to the central place to get the food and bring it back to their room in the barracks and then it would be divided up.

Each barracks had a leader and then there was one for each of the six rooms in the barracks. The barracks leader would send one man from each of the rooms to the mess hall. He'd go get the food and give it to the room leaders, and he would see that the food was divided among the men in the room.


RAMBLIN
WRECK

B - 17, the "Ramblin Wreck

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I guess when I was a prisoner, for over a year, we got Red Cross parcels two or three times. People had the mistaken idea we got them pretty often. When the war was over they found barns full of our Red Cross parcels that the Germans never distributed. They'd give them to their own people. They were starving to death too. I guess I'd have done the same thing.

We passed the time by creating our own ways of entertainment. We made wooden chess boards, wooden checkers, anything we could cut up out of tin. Of course the Germans got most of the tin we had. Cans went to the war effort. We were supposed to turn it in but we'd hide it, anything to frustrate the Germans. We would think up things. In fact we made up cards out of paper and board. I learned how to play bridge while I was there. You had to be innovative. You couldn't just sit there and vegetate. We had a lot of group discussions, and a lot of fights. You live together for a while and fights will happen. That and walking was about it.

Non - commissioned officers (sergeants) were not required to work. Had you been required to work you'd be better off with better rations. Army P.O.W.'s below the rank of sergeant were like that. All air crew members were sergeants or above. There were no privates flying. But I think you would have been better working on a farm as a private for you ate better. Many of the Army P.O.W.'s were in pretty good shape when they were released.

But when you are confined a long time with not a lot to do, you could go crazy. I was in with a British P.O.W.

who was there for six years. He was captured the first day of the war in 1939. He just about lost all his marbles. We got a piece of cardboard and made a medal and made a presentation to him on his sixth year. He was pretty flaky, and was mentally pretty unstable by then. I could see why. I wasn't there that long but could have ended up like him. That came from being bored with nothing to do.

We were hungry too and there was a lot of sickness. We had lice and a little bit of everything. We had dysentery, a lot of diarrhea. You had to be very careful. We were very fortunate that we had all been inoculated before. We would have died from just typhus if we hadn't had the shots. All the lice carried typhus.

As bad as we had it, the Germans treated the Russian P.O.W's as worse than animals. They had them pulling wagons like beasts. They were in the same camp but in their own areas. The Germans wouldn't let them mingle with us as we could with the British. The Russians did all the manual labor like cleaning out the toilets with what we called "the honey wagon." They took all that stuff out and it was used to fertilize the crops. In Europe they still used that stuff.

When we were in Stalag Luft VI we had a German commander who was and anti-Nazi really. He was a pretty descent sort of a man. Had they even known what he did they would have probably shot him. He treated us pretty fairly and would listen to our complaints an do what he could to make things better.

Once we got down to Stalag Luft IV it got pretty rough. Most of the guards there were ex - front line soldiers or SS or Gestapo types. Life got bad in that second camp and stayed that way to the end of the war. They'd haul you out in the middle of the night. They'd wake you up at two in the morning and get you outside for a head count. There might be snow up to your rear end, but you still fell out. They'd just knock you out of the beds.

Up to the Spring of 1944 most of the German P.O.W. camps had been run by the military, and treatment wasn't too bad. Then there was a big escape from another camp. Then things did change. Hitler issued orders on this, close to the end of the war he wanted all the P.O.W.'s killed. We heard of this and armed ourselves with weapons we made ourselves from beds and such. We made clubs to fight with if they had come in after us. We figured they couldn't kill all of us and some would survive.

Treatment finally started to get a little better in late April, early May, 1945 with the ending of the war. The cruel guards took off. The ones who treated us fairly well were the ones to stay. The bad ones knew what would happen to them if we could get a hold of them. So when we were liberated most of them were gone.

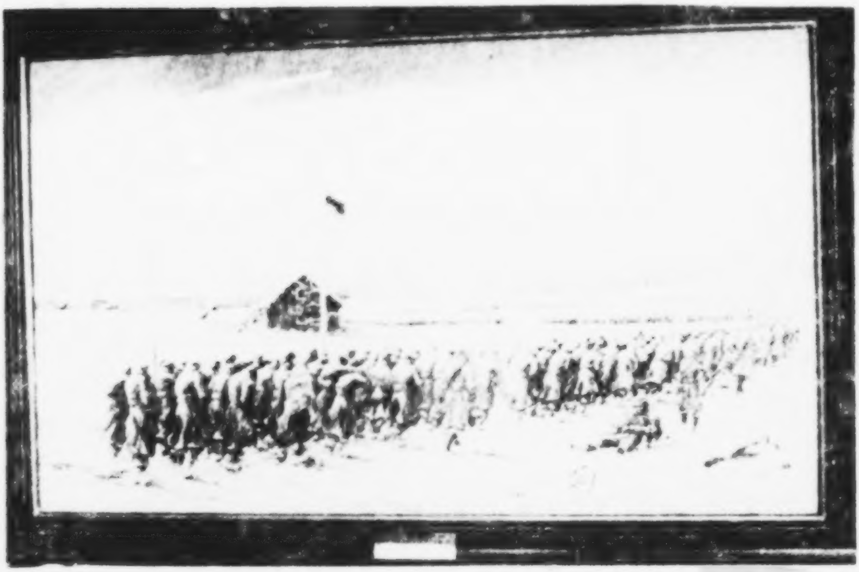
The worst of the guards was known as "Big Stoop." They caught him and he got a pitchfork right between the eyes. Americans did that. They got him plus another one known as "Iron Cross." I know "Iron Cross" killed four Americans. He walked up to them and shot them in the camp. He was later killed by Americans who had been prisoners. They caught "Big Stoop" at a farm. He'd taken off but they just ran across him later. He had hands as big as a ham. He could slap you across a room. I don't know how many got their ear drums ruptured from where he slapped them on the side of the head.

Another thing that happened in East Prussia at Heydekrug. They had these Russian P.O.W.'s giving the Germans a hard time. They wouldn't come out of their barracks so the Germans turned to guard dogs loose on them. THe Russians wrapped their arms up in blankets and killed the dogs, and then ate them. The Russians were not a literate group but didn't know the meaning of fear.

But overall, the daily life in the camps was very monotonous. When you're confined so much in a small area it's deadening. We had no movies or real entertainment. Now in East Prussia at Luft VI, the German commandant let the guys put on skits at a small theater type arrangement. But it ceased after we left there. In fact it ceased there before we left there. There was a Catholic priest who when he took confessions, but an English speaking guard always listened in.

There were no organized sports. I never saw a softball or a volleyball or some P.O.W.'s saw. I know the officer's camps were better than those for the enlisted men. The Germans always respected rank. They were very rank conscious.

Escape attempts ceased after "The Great Escape" when a lot of British officers escaped. HItler then had about 50 of them shot when they were recaptured. The Germans then put notices up in the P.O.W. camps saying that for each escapee, ten P.O.W left behind would be shot. The Germans had forgotten about the Geneva Convention when the SS and the Gestapo took over most control of the camps.



"The March" by Don Churchill shows how Jack Bowen is alive today because of the humanity of two men.

One is Lowell T. Birdwell, an army buddy who also made the death march. When Bowen fell in the snow, Birdwell ministered to his wounded

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companion until guards forced the stronger man to move on.

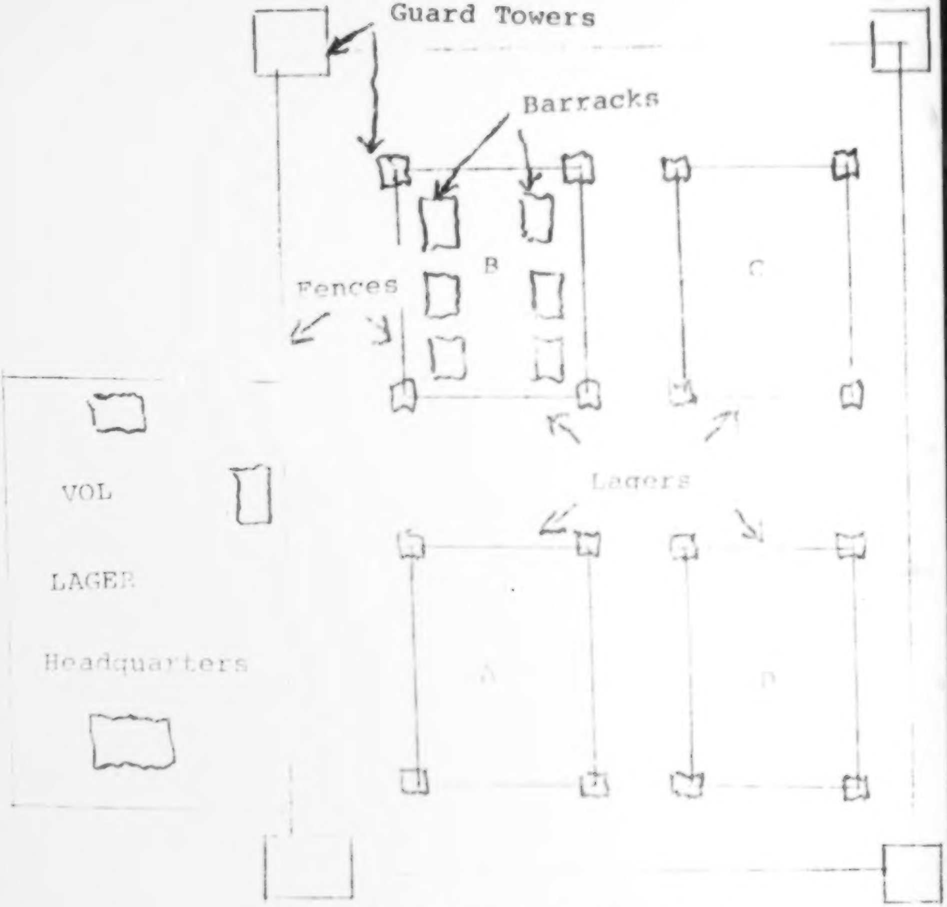
Bowen's other savior was a German army guard, a Pole conscripted by the German army after Germany occupied his homeland. The guard deserted to help Bowen. He found shelter, nursed the wounded man, and risked his own life repeatedly to steal food.

Last year, out of gratitude to Birdwell and the Polish guard, and as a tribute to prisoners of all wars, Bowen conceived the idea of recreating in an oil painting the moment of his fall. for the work, he commissioned artist Don Churchill, who commutes between a home in El Paso and one in the Rock Hill community.

The now - completed painting shows ranks of prisoners moving through snow as far as eye can see. In the foreground is the figure of Bowen lying in the snow as Birdwell bends over him and supports his head. Standing nearby is the Polish guard who will soon desert.

Today, Birdwell is retired and lives in Longview. Bowen sees him often.

The guard's story is not so happy. After liberation by British troops, he made his way back to Poland, armed with a "safe passage" written in English by Bowen to protect him from arrest by British or American troops. Soon afterwards, the Iron Curtain fell over Poland, and Bowen had been unable to locate his benefactor since.


Guard Towers
Barracks
B
C
Fences
Lagers
VOL
LAGER
Headquarters
A
D

In a prison camp there was a main compound or Vol Lager where:
- the commandant lived and worked,
- the guards lived,
- the dispensary was located,
- the administrative offices were.

Then it was divided into four parts or Lagers (A,B,C,D), and each would normally hold about 1,200 prisoners. In Luft IV there were Americans and British P.O.W.'s In Luft VI were Americans, British, and Russian P.O.W.'s

Jack Bowen - 1990

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Wade Prior

Wade Prior reached England for service with the 8th Air Force late in the war against Hitler's Germany. His joining the fight showed the dedication of the United States to pursue the war without pause until the surrender of Germany.

I was born May 17, 1924 and grew up here in Carthage, Texas. And I graduated from Carthage High School in 1941 with Jack Bowen and Travis Williamson. I went to one year to the college of Marshall at the same time as Travis. Then I went one semester to Texas A & M before the war and one semester after.

I went into the Service in April, 1943. I went into the Army Air Corps based on the score of a test I took. I had asked for air photography. Most of the cameras were automatic where they didn't need to be operated by a photographer. So the next thing I knew they were offering me a chance for the

Aviation Cadet program to be a pilot. So I went to Santa Anna, California after Basic Training. They then turned down 44% of us as they didn't need as many pilots as they had thought. So then they sent me to aviation mechanics school for B - 17's in Amarillo, Texas. After that I went to gunnery school just outside Las Vegas, Nevada. I think the place was called Indian Springs. I was qualified in two areas as each enlisted man on a B 17. If a fuel tank leaked or got shot into we transferred the fuel to other tanks. We had to check the landing gear to insure it was in a locked position. One time we started to land and it wasn't locked. I told the pilot so he had to run it down to a locked position manually.

I then went to Lincoln, Nebraska where they assembled bomber crews. Then we crossed the Atlantic in April, 1945. We went over on a ship that had been confiscated from the Ethiopians by the Italians and then we got it. It was the "Hermitage" I believe. We docked first in France and then went on to England. Then we continued on to a processing center for three or four days, then we were assigned to an air base. Barry St. Edmonds was the closest town to the base. I was with the 94th Bomb Group and the 332nd Bomber Squadron.

When we had roll call that first evening there, they told me I was to report to a certain room at base headquarters. They said there was someone who wanted to see me. I couldn't figure what was going on. Robert Jordan, of Carthage, was the secretary for the base commanding officer. He being from Carthage knew of me. I walked in and he was sitting in the base commander's office. It was a big surprise to see him there. I met up with one other local fellow in England. That was Odelle Langford who was at another base.

I arrived in England in April, 1945 when the war was almost over. So I only got to fly on three missions against the Germans. I flew the first two to Bordeaux, France. The Germans had been cut off there by the U.S. Army and were still defending the place with big guns protected in what you'd call concrete pillboxes. The Germans had been surrounded for several months. We were trying to starve them out there instead of having to go in and do battle with them.

We carried in our bombbay, we carried some fiber wing tanks loaded with thermite. We had blasting caps attached to them for detonators. This thermite makes extremely hot fire. And we went back two days later and dropped some 500 pound bombs. The French Navy was out in the ocean waiting in their ships, out of range of those guns, to get into the harbor. With the guns knocked out the ships would go for the harbor. I don't know how successful we were in destroying those guns. The third mission was south of Dresden, Germany against some bridges near a little place called Perma.

About a week after the war was over against Germany we were out on a night flight for training. I smelled a little gasoline in the bombbay. Later that night I told the ground mechanic about it. He said the ordnance people had been washing out the bombbay with gasoline. But the next night that plane went out with another crew and disappeared. We flew for about three days looking for a trace of the crew or the plane. I think the plane must have had a gas tank leaking. It didn't look like more than a quart of gas on the catwalk of the bombay. We never did find a trace of crew or plane. It must have just exploded.

On the day that Japan surrendered we were out on a training flight. There was eleven B - 17's together and we formed a circle and flew around the Eiffel Tower in Paris. We must have made a dozen trips flying around it. It was a good way to celebrate.

Then in September, 1945, I was transferred to occupation duty in Berlin, Germany. I was still on flight status even though we didn't fly much. We only flew ten or twelve hours per month. We were still flying B - 17's. We took off and carried a man from the U.S. who was with the Civil Aeronautics Administration, and we got to make flights out to other places. He was helping set up routes for commercial air lines for American air lines to come to Europe and Europeans to have flights to the U.S. So I got to go to Stockholm, Sweden and Copenhagen, Denmark. We also went to one place in Scotland. Another we made was flying some surplus supplies to Port Lyautey (near Casablanca) and to Oran in North Africa.

I saw a little bit of Germany and the damage our bombers inflicted in places like Berlin. Then loaded up and we went from Berlin to a town near Munich. We stayed there about a week or ten days and then they put us on boxcars and we went to a port near Paris, France. They loaded us up on a ship and we crossed the Atlantic to New York City. I finally got out of the Service on April 13, 1946. I got my discharge at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas.

I didn't receive much in the way of medals. I did receive the Good Conduct Medal and the campaign medals for service during and after the war. I've forgotten what they were all called.

Now to go back to that first mission to Bordeaux, I wanted to tell why we dropped the thermite on those pillboxes. The hot fire created by the thermite was supposed to suck out all the air so the people manning the guns couldn't survive. We never did know the results for sure.

On a mission the lead plane drops a smoke bomb so the other bombardiers can get the wind drift and plan accordingly. I could see that happening on our first mission and thought for sure a plane was shot down. But it was only the smoke bombs. On the Bordeux missions we didn't meet any flak or German fighters. When we went to Dresden the formation ahead of us lost six planes. The Germans had jet fighters and they got up into the sun. Our gunners couldn't see the jets coming at them. Those six were from another Bomb Group and weren't part of our formation. They were a half mile or a little more ahead of us. The Germans knocked down six of nine planes in that group, flying in a diamond formation. The jets were gone by the time we got up ahead. I just saw the jets down flying at treetop level. American P - 51 fighters were chasing them. That was our last mission of the war.

We almost went on another one though. One morning, just a day or two before the war ended, we loaded up some

British made torpedoes on our B - 17's. They were attached on the bottom of the wings. They were supposed to be used against submarine pens in Kiel, Germany. We got a recall on the mission. We never knew if the weather was the reason or what. We were glad not to go because with the torpedoes attached to the wings we couldn't use the wing flaps. That made us nervous. The torpedoes stuck far back under the rear edge of the wings where the flaps were. The torpedoes were to be used for they claimed they could crack twenty - five feet of concrete which was used to protest the subs while in base. What concerned us was one of the shackles holding the torpedoes might hang up and not release it. There would have been a danger then of the torpedo turning loose on the runway on our return. Luckily we never made the mission. We taxied out on the runway to take off and then were called back. We were happy that day.

So as I said, I got back home in April, 1946. I went to Texas A & M for a semester, and then decided I would rather be out doing something. The military experience just made some of us restless, and so I went to work. I came back here and first operated a little saw mill. I ran that for two or three years. Then I opened up a feed store and that included custom feed grinding and mixing. I had the Purina feed dealership. Years went on and my health made it so I no longer could handle the feed. So I quit that. Now I take care of things on the place here and sell a little timber now and then. We travel and vacation about a month out of the year. I got married in 1955, the first day of April. So I've been married 35 years now. We've got two daughters and three grandchildren. That keeps me busy on a regular basis.

O yes, before I forget, there were those fancy designs on the planes. The one I was assigned to had "Ordnance Express." The ground mechanic sent it our on fifteen missions without any defects due to his work. He was an exceptionally good mechanic. I was on the same crew for the three missions. We had left the U.S. together, as I said, after meeting in Lincoln, Nebraska. We got our plane in England.

Once the war was over they shifted us around. We didn't fly with a full crew. I've met two of the crew I flew with in combat through the years. One of them I've seen three or four times in Iowa. He was the ball turret gunner. I've been by at least three times and visited with him. The other one I saw was in California. I understand he's not living now. My pilot is gone, he's no longer alive. We had a strong bond as we had to depend on each other for our lives.

Wade Prior and faithful friend in front of well loved "Air Stream."

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Odelle Langford

Odelle Langford was older than the others we talked to about their experiences in World War II. He was 30 when he entered the Air Corps in 1942. But from his service he got to see a lot of the United States and got to England as well. To him the war was an interruption, and something to be experienced until he could return to a career of farming and ranching in Panola County.

I was born May 13, 1912. I was born right up the road from here. I've been here practically all my life except for a few months I was in California one time. I went out there and worked. And then I was in the Service. The rest of my life has been right here in this community. Norene and I went in together and built this house in 1979.

I went to school at Pleasant Ridge over here, where the Pleasant Ridge

Baptist Church is. That was the school house. I went through the seventh grade there and then went to Carthage. I then graduated from Carthage in 1933. I went to college down at Nacogdoches for two years then came back here to start my career in farming which covered most of my life. I was farming, ranching, raising cows. I farmed until they starved me off of it. I grew cotton, corn, peas, and peanuts. Cotton was the main crop up until they started growing tomatoes. They had the tomato sheds at Gary and Carthage.

I never did get married until I came out of the service in World War II. I was 38 when I married. I met a girl at Gary. Her name was Anice but they called her Ann. She passed away in 1968 with cancer. She had one boy when we married and then we had five children ourselves. Then I married Norene in 1979. Of course I knew her back in the early 1930's. In fact she married my half - great - uncle who was about my age. My great-grandfather had two sets of children. And she married on of the boys from the second set. He died so she was a widow when we married.

Now Pearl Harbor and the attack in 1941 was a big surprise to me. I didn't dream of such. Well, I think we were out in the yard that day when we heard the news. We got it on the radio. We had a radio. That was about the only time we had company, after we got the radio. People would come up to listen to the radio and visit with us. Same way as when television came along. We didn't get one of those for quite awhile after they came in.

The draft didn't get me until

February 28, 1942. They'd come to the point where they were going by age, and discharging the ones who were 35 and older. In fact I had a cousin over here that they drafted him and discharged him when he was 35. Then a few days later they took him again. Then they got me.

I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma and was inducted. Then I went to Shepherd Field for my Basic at Wichita Falls, Texas. I was there for about six weeks then went to Colorado for armorer school. I didn't even know what I was in. I was in the Service, but then I found I was in the Army Air Corps. We left there after I finished my schooling, I learned about machine guns, rifles, pistols and so forth. I learned how to take them apart and put them back together again, and to service them. We had to keep them spotless.

And then we went to someplace in California for just a short while. Then they sent me to Gila Bends, Arizona, out in the desert. I was there for awhile, and then they put me in charge of a crew of armorers taking care of the planes such as synchronizing the guns to shoot between the propeller blades. I stayed there for awhile and then went to a base at Arizona doing the same thing. And it was still in the desert.

After awhile I got fed up with the Service as a whole, with me just being out in the desert, not seeing any action. There would be a group of Cadets come in on occasion and we'd load up ammunition for them to go out and target shoot from the planes. They had ground targets, and they also pulled a flag from a plane for an aerial target. After awhile they started to ship off the people who I went there with. They were getting more active duty. I wanted to go, even asked them. But they wouldn't do it.

Later on I was out on a ramp waiting for some planes to come in, during lunch time. They came up to me, and asked me if I wanted foreign service. I just told them flat, after they wouldn't let me go when I asked for it, that I just didn't care whether I did or didn't. I said, "I asked for it, and you wouldn't send me , and now everyone is gone that I knew and wanted to go with." They said, "If you want to go, get packed and be up at this office this afternoon at such a time." I told them I couldn't. I was the only one on the ramp waiting for the planes to come in, to rest of the crew had gone to chow. They said, "Well get somebody out here." So I just walked off and packed and got to the office like they said. They shipped me out to Colorado, and I caught up with my friends who had left ahead of me. We did a little training to get ready to go overseas, but it didn't amount to nothing.

They sent us from there to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. We were there a few days before we got on a boat. We got on the boat December 5, 1943. We went out for our last fling so to speak. We ran into some girls, and we invited them to go out and eat that night. They said, "Where do you want to go?" We said we wanted to go to some nice place but not too expensive. They took us to a place. I looked at the menu and the cheapest thing I could find on the menu was Coca-Cola for 50 cents a glass. Remember this was back in 1943. I told my buddy, "Let's get out of here." We got up and told the other boys, there were three or four of us, that we were going. The rest stayed there. We got on out. The next day those boys were explaining how expensive things were.

So we got on the boat the 5th day of December, 1943. We went across on what they said was the largest convoy that ever crossed the Atlantic. We were on what was called an English cattle boat that had been converted into a troop carrier. We were on that thing - and on the second day out I thought I'd go take a shower. I went down to the shower, took off my clothes, and about that time they went to firing the guns. I just knew we were under attack. About that time the lights went out. I thought, "We're into it now." I got out of the shower, and hunted and hunted, and couldn't even find my clothes in the shower room in the dark. Then the lights came back on. And I found out they were only test firing the guns on the boat. But I didn't know they were going to do that. I was on the ship for three weeks. We got across with a lot of zig-zagging. We stayed on the boat for almost a week waiting to get in the channel where we could get off. There were so many ships that had come across it took a long time to unload everybody. I just waited as I didn't know what was going on. They fed us good when we went across. Lots of 'em didn't like the food. It was English food for they had English cooks. Most of 'em got seasick anyway and couldn't eat. I never did get sick. And I ate good. Finally we got off the boat.

I was in one or two camps before we got placed. I was with the 8th Air Force heavy bombardment. My base was at

Bedford, England. We were about 90 miles from London, south I believe. Some of those English boys could cover the miles on their bikes. They'd go from London to Bedford in a day. I was with the 308th, but I can't remember if that was the number of the group or the squadron. They were flying B - 17 bombers. I saw Wade Prior in England one time when I was there.

I very well remember D - Day, the invasion of France on June 6, 1944. We had six or seven missions planned for that one day. So we were busy all that day loading bombs and ammunition. The planes would just cross the English Channel on the mission and be back again in no time.

I was an armorer which means I took care of the guns, bombs, and ammunition. I kept the guns in shape and made sure they had ammunition. The B - 17 had lots of gunners. We had to check every turret to make sure they had their ammunition. We'd take the guns out, clean them up, and put them back in. Them we'd put on the particular load of bombs they wanted for a mission - 500, 1,000, 2,000 pound bombs, or what. The depot would send up what was supposed to go on the plane. All we had to do was jack them up under the plane and load them. We thought we needed to be careful. I think we were overly careful. The bombs wouldn't explode until the fuzes were set. The pins had to be pulled before the bombs dropped. I didn't work with the fuzes though. We heard some of the bombs drop at night while we were there. Once in awhile we could hear them from London, but not too often. One night some fell pretty close. I thought maybe we were under attack. But we found out later it was British planes that dropped them. They did it on purpose as the plane was afraid to land with the bombs on board. They knew it was safe to drop them where they did.

I thought the B - 17 was a good airplane. Of course we used them up, sent out brand new ones on a mission and never saw them again. They'd get shot down, some of 'em, first time out. And some of them made a lot of missions. They could take a lot of punishment. But I never had any great desire to fly missions myself, not in one of them. We had two that crashed right on the base one day. This day the visibility wasn't too good, foggy or something. They came in at low altitude and there were two groups. I don't know, they got messed up somewhere. They came in from two directions and two planes came together. We happened to be watching out there, waiting for them to come in. There went two planes and twenty - two men.

The crews were pretty well trained. They were a good bunch to work with. They treated me well. We had good food most of the time. I told them they starved me to death for I weighed four pounds less when I got out than when I went in the Service. We always had the food cooked where we were at. Maybe once in awhile we'd take a bunch of vehicles somewhere. They got me roped in on one of them, taking a bunch to another base. They gave us some C - rations to eat on the way, but they weren't all that bad either.

I didn't get to see too much of England. I stayed on base mostly and saved my money. That let me buy the place down below Gary at the time. While I was in the Service in England I received the Panola Watchman regularly. And I saw an ad for the place near Gary. I got my dad to go look at the place to check it out, and then he got it for me. So I had something to show for my money I got in the Service.

I got to England two or three days before Christmas in 1943. And I stayed there until October, 1945. Then I got sent home on points. I forgot how many points you had to have to go home and get out. Points were based on length of time served, etc. I was a buck sergeant when I left the States and a buck sergeant when I got back. The staff sergeant who was in charge of the armorers wanted to put me up for staff sergeant one time but he knew I was fixing to come home. He said they usually promoted the ones who had been in the longest, more so than what they had done. Some had been there longer than I had. I told them it didn't make any difference for I was fixing to get out. It would have been something earlier, would have been a raise where I got a little more money.

I got my first paycheck, I say paycheck but they paid us in cash, for two months and four days time I got $35.10. That was when I first went in the Service. I didn't get paid the first month, my orders got behind or something.

In October, 1945 I came back to the U.S. on the Queen Mary. It didn't take us long to get home on that big liner. Then they sent me to San Antonio. They had so many they were discharging, they sent me on home and had me come back in about three weeks for my discharge.

Thanks to being in the Service I got to see a lot of the country I wouldn't have seen otherwise. I found out one thing - those Englishmen don't know what's going on next door. Well, one day I did go into town in England. I got into town and didn't have anything to do, and really no place to go. So I thought I'd walk around and just go down to the post office. That was something I could even ask about. I asked an old Englishman there where the post office was. He replied, "Well, old chap, I just don't know. But they got one here alright. Ask that sailor there he can tell you." There was an English sailor sitting there. I asked him, and the sailor pointed out the post office- right across the road in plain sight.

You could go eight or ten miles from one place to another in England and they spoke a totally different dialect. They had a different accent from where you were at. It took awhile to get used to them so you could understand what they were saying. I'd get to go into town every once in awhile and eat fish and french fries. You could get a big plate of fish and french fries for maybe 35 cents. It was good for a change. It was different from the food we got on base.

If I had it to do over again I might take more time to see the country than I did. At the time I was trying to get ahead a little bit and save my money. So many of the people were in the Service with the attitude that they'd never get home again alive so they went wild and spent all their money. They'd get in a crap game pay day night and lose it all. Then they'd have to borrow some money to get by on. But I was able to buy the farm with the money I saved. I sent the money to my dad and he got it for me, the place down in Gary. When I left home I had every intention of coming back. I didn't make plans to die in the war.

I received a Good Conduct Medal and some campaign medals. I got the European service medal with several battle stars for events like the Normandy invasion. I was in the Air Corps for almost four years, and in England with the Eighth Air Force for two years. Then I came home and have been here just about all the time since 1945.

Odelle Langford

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Billie McKee

We are fortunate to have Billie Ryser McKee as a friend an a neighbor. We knew that World War II was a struggle which required the will and talents of all Americans. So we are glad to present her story, and how a woman could make a highly visible contribution to victory in the air against Germany and Japan.

I was born in Colorado on November 8, 1917. It was near Lamar, and my father proved up a place there. In those years they were the first to live on the land. I think he began by living in a dugout and then they built a house. Then in a couple of years we moved to Medicine Lodge, Kansas, which is central southern Kansas. And I went to school there.

When college time came I went to Northwestern State, one year and then I went to Wichita State College. That was about 100 miles from Medicine Lodge. When I got there I was studying to be a teacher. But about that time the world situation was worsening and it was getting warlike. So the government said, through the school there, that they would train 62 young men and would train three women to fly at the college. You had to have had 60 hours credit, you had to pass an army - navy physical, and pass and eye test. The government was sponsoring this through the university.

So I did not tell my mother about this because women didn't do those things. But I went and applied for the pilot training program. I signed up. It was in 1940, the end of the year. By the time I got started it was 1941. But anyway, I made it. I have a copy of a telegram from the university that I was accepted. Of course I didn't tell my mother until I got the telegram. They thought women doing this were crazy. Any way, we had three months of ground school on navigation, engines, meteorology. And then we started flying. I had been working on my college degree but the flying then took all my time. I was a junior by that time. One also had to be 20 - 25 years of age to get in. At Wichita they called us the "Flying Shockers" after the school name.

At the airport in Wichita they had asked George Harte, who was an old barnstormer (pilot), had the place for flying where we would go to train. And he was an old and good friend of Howard Hughes. And right across from where we were at the airport was the Cessna Aircraft Company plant which was big. Duwayne and Dwight Wallace were the owners. And George Harte who taught me to fly was they. They and Howard Hughes would come in and sit in my classes. One of them was always there. That's because women just didn't fly often. One of them was always there. One time Jacqueline Cockran flew in to visit. She was ten or twelve years older than I am. She flew in from California every once in a while. So I met her too. Howard Hughes was a very, very nice man. He sat in my classes all the time because I was a girl I guess. He was very nice and very handsome. He was fascinated that a girl was in training to be a pilot. There were originally two other girls in the class. Mary Spangler from Wichita dropped out, and the other one dropped out to get married. So I was the only one left. I was always having my picture made.

Billie Ryser and Beechcraft at Harte Flying Service, Wichita, Kansas in 1941.

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We flew Aeronicas, Piper Cubs, Cessna, Stinson (gull wing) and big Boing planes. We trained and I got my licenses we had the beginner's license and then the advanced one. When I first soloed I was really upset with them. They sent me from Wichita to Hutchinson, Kansas. It was a triangle pattern. I was mad at them because they called ahead to make sure I made it. But I did ok and made my licenses.

And of course I saw many sad things. There was on the flight line lots of errors. One time one of the students got too close to a propeller. You had to start them hand back in those days. As they said, we flew by the seat of our pants, and were exposed to dangers. I saw that one and several others get whacked by the propellers and killed. And then one time one of my favorite instructors, Bill Woodward, had a student who froze at the controls. They had just taken off. And they were probably 500 feet high. The student froze at the controls, and there wasn't anything that could be done. They were both killed. There was a dual control - in a front seat and a back seat. That student just locked the controls in his grip and the instructor couldn't break that grip. They had us go out and fly right after the crash so it would destroy our ability to fly.

The security was closely watched there by the F.B.I. and others. That was because it seemed war was coming and times getting more unsettled. Well I finished my pilot training then. A man by the name of Frank Altman was head of the Civil Aeronautics there. There were about ten of us who had gotten our licenses, all men plus myself. We were in a theater on a Sunday afternoon when Pearl Harbor happened. They didn't tell of the attack over the news yet, but we were called to the airport on that Sunday afternoon. The F.B.I. had come in and we were finger printed, hand printed, to tighten security. They were very careful. I know the first P - 38 that came in was a military secret. But I wanted a picture of it. One of the instructors did take a picture of it and I still have it. But they didn't usually do that.

In three days, Frank Altman the head of the Civil Aeronautics and myself were sent by plane to San Antonio. And then we were assigned to Cuero, Texas, near Victoria. It's a German town. The airfield was out about three miles from Cuero. It was an Army Contrast School- the 303rd Air Force Detachment. The Contrast School meant the existence of an agreement with the government to train pilots. That was where they sent me. Mr. Altman was to be vice - president of the school. People came in from every place. I was an instructor. The students learned the basic skills of ground school first, then they spent nine weeks learning to fly and become pilots. If they didn't get through that they would become navigators or bombardiers. But almost all of them ended overseas during the war.

The first day I arrived there and got to the airport, which was called Brayton Field. There were the civilians on one side and the military on the other. I was a civilian. The day I got there my husband - to - be also arrived. He was Marlon "Mac" McKee from Henderson, Texas. His father W.A. McKee, was a Methodist preacher. We met for the first time on that first day at Cuero. He was an instructor also. He ended up with a commission and by the end of the war was a major. But us women didn't receive a commission. After the war we got married by his father in Henderson in 1946. Then we came to Carthage. He had graduated from Southern Methodist University and was a banker here. He worked for Herman Jacobs at the First National Bank. We both were flight instructors at Cuero throughout the war.

Fillie Ryser and Steerman Trainer she used to train hundreds of Aviation Cadets.

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The instructors at Cuero came from all over. Another one there was Ralph Piper whose father owned the Piper Cub Company (plane makers). There were a lot of men there, including some old barn stormers, who had been flying for years. They were wonderful instructors. They were good fliers. We had an older man from Brownsville, he could do anything. He was wonderful. The bases were where they trained the cadets and they had some wonderful instructors. We had a group of civilian instructors but the base was run by the Air Corps. The students were the Aviation Cadets.

The main plane we used for the training was the single engine Sterman. That's what we taught the students on. It had a front seat and a back seat and stick control. The instructors sat in the back. I never really had any close calls myself. I guess I'd be afraid to do any of that stuff now. Really you had to have a lot of guts in those days to do some of the things we did. We had this old Chief Bohan, and Indian, who was a wonderful flier. Every once in awhile he'd stop his plane at the far end of the field. Come to find out he kept a bottle under the seat of his plane. But he was a good pilot. They were civilians as I said. But the men could get a commission in the Air Corps if they qualified and wanted it. Mac, my future husband, received his commission. I went with him to San Antonio when he received it. And I remember the first people to salute him were a group of Black soldiers there.

I was at Cuero the whole time. I was a civilian pilot instructor. I

Billie Ryser with fellow instructor Bill Woodward in 1941 in Piper Club. He was killed shortly thereafter in a training accident

wasn't a W.A.S.P. who were into the military. I was well treated while I was there. I tried to do my job like I was supposed to. The Aviation Cadets (the students) were good to work with. I never had any trouble even though not all of them made it through the training to be pilots. I learned not to be afraid and that I could do things I wanted to.

I don't know if you remember this, Mr. Herman Jacobs when Mac came here, he brought a plane. He had a Cessna and then he had another little plane. And

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you remember the airport was out where McDonald's is now. All that land out there was an airport. It was a small airport. Mr. Jacobs had two planes. We flew his planes quite a lot. We flew to Kansas one time. Glen Brooks owned part of the land. Everett Page learned to fly as did Herman Jacobs. Jack Parker came out and Mac showed him about flying. I think some of his folks had a plane in Center. Mac took Mr. Jacobs on banking trips.

Mac died in 1957. Mac and Mr. Jacobs had gone to Tennessee. They stopped in Jackson, Mississippi. Dr. Z.L. Daniel was there too. And Mac had a massive heart attack and died there. He was 41, and I was 36. The week before we had gone to Tyler. He was in the Air Force Reserve and went there for a physical. He passed his physical, so you never know what's going to happen to you.

I had two daughters, Karen and Kathleen. They were three and six. So I stayed here in Carthage. I went to work at the high school for ten years, and then went to Panola College until I retired. I went there the same time as Q.M. Martin.

I thought I was a good pilot. I didn't get a commission like the men did, but I didn't worry about it. It was a different world then. Maybe I made it easier for women who came along later. It made for an interesting life.

Billie McKee - 1990

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E. B. Morrison

E.B. Morrison is a respected and beloved citizen of Carthage and Panola County. Now retired he spent 45 years in a career as a teacher, administrator and coach. Most of these years were spent with the Carthage schools.

When World War II called so many of the young people into uniform, Mr. Morrison joined many of those whom he had taught and coached before. He used his skills as a teacher to become a skilled intelligence officer and was able to guide young men through perilous times.

I was born in Timpson, Texas on June 26, 1907. I just had a birthday in June, I'm 83 years old. When I was in elementary school my folks moved to Llano, Texas out in the Hill Country, west of Austin. I graduated from high school in Llan in 1926. I stayed out of school a year and worked. My dad operated a cafe and a bakery and I helped him in the business.

Then I told my dad I wanted to go to the University of Texas and he let me go. He hired someone in my place. I went to school in Austin for two years. I dropped out and started teaching. In no time I finished up and graduated by going in the summer. My first school was in Llano County at Lone Grove. It was a country school six - eight miles out of Llano. My next year I got a job at London, Texas which was near Junction, Texas. I organized and equipped the first football team that school ever had. We played a schedule. Only one boy had school experience playing before. I used him as a leader and it worked out nicely. We had a pretty successful year.

The following year was I was employed here in Carthage as the head football coach and Spanish teacher. September 1, 1931 was when I started. I stayed here then. I was football coach for four years and became principal of one of the elementary schools. I was also the baseball coach for the high school team. During those days our playing field was where the hospital is now. We had our football field there. Our basketball court was laid out there as we didn't have a gymnasium. We had a track for the track team. I coached all the athletics, girls and boys. I had a girls volleyball team and a girl's playground ball team for fifteen years and younger. Gary was one of our main opponents. We played with a sixteen inch ball and a small bat. The most fun I had was coaching those girls. I expected more out of the boys.

I got married in 1933 to Orita Rigger. Her daddy was a Methodist preacher. At the time when we were married he was living in Lufkin. My wife was a teacher in Carthage when I came here in 1931. She came here about two years before I did.

I guess you could say my high spot in Carthage came in the early 1940's. We had three successful baseball teams. Unfortunately from my viewpoint we came in second in the state for three years in a row. It looked like I was in a rut. That's when Travis Reeves, or Jim, was allstate for three years as a pitcher. He was the number one right handed pitcher in the state.

Pearl Harbor was a surprise to me. We had just bought a new home over on Neal Street. Our first weekend at home in the new house was that time. Pearl Harbor was on a Sunday and I was listening to a professional football game. My wife was doing some puttering around with some drapes. They broke into the ball game to tell us about Pearl Harbor. The next day, Monday morning, we stood outside the high school (the radio wouldn't work inside) and students and faculty listened to President Roosevelt declare war. I was now the high school principal and coached the baseball team.

In May, 1942 I took the baseball team to Dallas for the state tournament for the second year in a row. There I picked up a newspaper, and there was a write - up about the Air Corps wanting high school coaches to teach physical fitness to Aviation Cadets. There would be three months training first and a commission as a second lieutenant. That sounded like a good deal to me. I called my wife and said I was going to check on it. I had my draft card in my pocket I was supposed to report to the draft board the next week. So I decided I would just go ahead and enlist. I was along in years and it sounded like a good deal for me.

So I went around to enlist at the recruiters office in Dallas. The recruiting officer approached my credentials and swore me in right there. Then he said, "Report to the courthouse at four this afternoon. Bring nothing but your razor and your tooth brush." I said, "Wait just a minute, I have really made a mistake." I had the Dallas News with me and opened it up to the sports page of the ball game Carthage was to play that night. I said, "I'm their coach and I can't be here at four this afternoon because I have to be out at the ball park tonight with my boys. If you want me you'll have to send the MP's after me. He laughed and realized I was sincere. He replied, "I'm going to give you a five day delay in route, and tickets on the bus. Get your team and play the game and get them home. Then report to Mineral Wells, Texas for basic training." So that all happened and I got through basic training.

Then I went to Truax Field in Madison, Wisconsin as an athletic instructor. I directed calisthenics among other duties. An order came out that officers would study a foreign language and I got picked to be a Spanish instructor. I had my degree from the University of Texas with a major in Spanish. They pulled me out of athletics and I taught Spanish for officers at the base there.

Then I qualified for Officer Candidate School late in 1943. I went to Florida for my training and came out a second lieutenant. I then was assigned to go overseas with the 15th Air Force. I trained in Salt Lake City, El Paso, and then at Langley Field, Virginia. In December, 1943 I shipped out on a Liberty Ship for Italy from Hampton Roads, Virginia. And I stayed in Italy as an intelligence officer. It was a long, slow trip. One morning I went out on deck to kill time and we were just sitting still in the water. They'd had engine trouble and we sat there until it could be repaired. We were sitting ducks but no German subs came along. We then caught up with the convoy and landed at Salerno, Italy.

It was January, 1944 when I arrived. I was stationed on the Adriatic Sea between Foggie and Bari. The base was near a small village. Travis Williamson, of Carthage, was also at the same base and I saw him. He'd been one of my students. I was with the 455th and I think he was with the 454th Bomber Squadron (both flew B - 24 bombers).

I remember D - Day. June 6, 1944 when the Allies invaded France. Our assignment was to bomb the German fighter bases behind the lines to keep them from attacking our landing barges. It was a successful mission for us. I got credit for participating in that campaign.

I was the S - 2 of the squadron. My primary duty was to brief the air crews on the strength of the enemy, tell them about the anti - aircraft guns to be expected and the enemy fighters. This was before each mission. This was called, briefing the crew. Of course, the weather officer would tell of the weather that day, the armament would discuss the bombs to be used, and I'd tell them of expected enemy strength. I remember on day telling them about the enemy anti - aircraft fire being intense over the target. But I told them it ought not to last more than a few seconds. And one of the crewmen said, "I can live in hell that long." It was [illegible] to have a little humor along with it.

Then when the crews came home from a mission I had to interrogate them as to results. The information I got from them was like an athletic scouting report to help on future missions. You'd know what to expect.

I was also the censorship officer. I had to read the mail. There was a regulation that every enlisted man's letter had to be read by an officer. The officers name had to appear on the envelope as proof that the letter had no military secrets in it. If the letter had secret data, the officer was authorized to cut out the word or sentence with a razor blade. One day an enlisted man came in to me he said in a sheepish way, "Captain, my girlfriend is unhappy because she hasn't received a letter with parts of it cut our. I'm going to mention some military secrets in my next letter even though I know better. And I want you to take your razor blade and cut out what you need to. Then it can go to her and she will be off my neck."

Another incident involved censorship and started with my commanding officer calling me in. He didn't do that often, so I went in wondering what he wanted. He had a letter to the U.S. Secretary of

War from a girl back in the States. She's written him to get information about her boyfriend that she hasn't heard from." The commanding officer gave me the letter to solve the problem. So I went to one of the enlisted men who helped me and he cleared it all up. He told how one of our sergeants had gone back home after flying his missions. He was returning to his wife. The sergeant had been writing the girl and didn't want to complicate his marriage. So he'd had the girls letters returned and not forwarded to him.1 So I had to satisfy the girl and write her that the man had been writing her an assumed name.

Some of the boys from Carthage discovered their old coach was in Italy from reading the Panola Watchman. There's an interesting story that happened. But J.R. Underwood and his brother both played football under me. J.R. was in Italy. He was a sergeant, and I believed attached to the 12th Air Force. His brother George was stationed in England. George (or Buddy) was shot down and killed. I was sitting in my tent reading a letter from my wife. She wrote me about what had happened to him.

I was sitting there with my head down, saddened over the news, and I had the feeling of someone standing in the doorway of my tent. I looked up and it was J.R. Underwood. Well, it was a very emotional meeting, as you may well understand, between the two of us. And I asked him how he came to be there. He said, "When the news of Buddy came through, my commanding officer got it first. He called me in and asked if there was anything he could do for me."

Felices Pascuas
y
Prosp año nue

E.B. Morrison and aides during his tour as a Spanish teacher for Air Corps officers

And J.R. replied, "Well, I'll tell you sir, I don't have any relatives here but I have a mighty good friend. He's a captain with the 15th Air Force. He's stationed somewhere in Italy, but I don't know where." His captain told J.R. he'd find out where I was and he did. He gave J.R. a three day pass and a jeep to find me.

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Jimmy Duran of Carthage met his friend E.B. Morrison in Italy

So J.R. came to my tent and spent the night there. He went to the officer's mess with me. I did the best I could to console him. That's how J.R. found me.

Now the other boys we just sort of met up accidentally. Now there's a picture of J.R. and me but I think I gave them all to him so he could give them to his children. You can see from another picture I met Jimmy Duran who has since died. I also saw Jerry Long and Vernon Rowden.

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I was awarded the Bronze Star. The citation which came with it stated I received it for "meritorious achievement." And of course I was older than the boys flying combat and I took an interest in them. I was like a father confessor. I remember one boy came to me and told me how his girl had written him a "Dear John" letter and send the ring back. He was all upset and wanted me to help him. I don't remember how I handled the situation but I hope I helped.

E.B. Morrison's home in Italy

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The day I got orders to come home, I was on orders to go to Venice for a week vacation. They called me up to headquarters and asked, "Do you want to go home or do you want to go to Venice?" I said, "Boy, I want to go home, I'll see Venice some other time." I came home in August, 1945. I came home on 30 day leave waiting for orders to join the 20th Air Force in the Pacific. But they dropped the atomic bomb on Japan at that same time. And when I did report back for duty they told me I could get out of the Service. I had earned enough points including two Presidential Unit Citations awarded my squadron. So I was discharged at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

Then I went to Austin and the Teachers Employment Office. My wife was teaching in Sulphur Springs waiting for me to get settled somewhere. I was told of a Superintendent's job at Granger in Williamson County and went and was hired while still in uniform. I sent for my wife and she resigned her job and joined me. In 1948 I resigned and went to Cuero, Texas as superintendent. I stayed there until 1057. Then I came back to Carthage until I finally retired in the mid - 1970's. Counting my Service time I retired with 45 years in education. Since then I've gardened. My wife and I have taken several overseas trips. We even got to Venice, Italy so I saw it after all.

E.B. Morrison - 1990

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J.R. Underwood

J.R. Underwood and his wife, Helen, are now enjoying well deserved retirement after busy working lives. We visited with him to find out more about his experiences with the Army Air Corps in World War II. He was the only one we interviewed who had a role with fighters. And he confirmed again that war is a young persons activity and that many pay a high price.

I was born outside Waxahachie, Texas in 1914, September 8th. My father worked in a cotton gin, he was the bookkeeper. I was the oldest of seven children. My father and mother later ran a hotel in Italy, Texas. That's where I started school in the first grade.

In 1925 we moved to Carthage, Texas. I had two sisters who had been born in Italy, Texas. Both live on Lake Cherokee at the present time. Both of their husbands served overseas in World War II. But in 1925 my father bought a cotton gin here and at that time there were nineteen cotton gins in Panola County. The county made I've forgotten how many bales of cotton a year. There's been a controversy about a bale that was made down in Woods Post Office. It was hand picked and then the lint picked off the seed by hand and carried to the gin and baled up. The bagging was said to be of silk. It was held together by gold or silver buckles. It was on display and

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then was shown off in London. Last I heard it was back in the Houston Cotton Exchange but that building had been done away with now. It was supposed to be the best bale of cotton ever.

So when we moved to Carthage I had five sisters and one brother. We all graduated from Carthage High School. I graduated in 1932. I was the oldest child. My brother was next. We called him "Buddy," but his name was George Edward. My father gave us all a college education. I started college at Lon Morris and then finished in Marshall. Two of my sisters were teachers. One, Wanda, works for Shell Oil Company. One, Louise Windham, lives in Carthage and works for the Mc Guire Construction Company. Another one, Lucille, lives in Abilene and just retired from teaching after 32 years. Evelyn, my next to the oldest sister, taught at Panola Junior College among other places. Mary Eva taught in Carthage during World War II and moved to Fort Worth.

I got out of college in 1935. I then ran a filling station for awhile. Then during the ginning season I worked at the cotton gin. We had a bunch of trucks which we moved to get the cotton to Houston to sell. We got in the produce business to use the trucks we had. We hauled produce out of the Rio Grande Valley to northern places like Kansas City and Joplin, Missouri, St. Louis, Omaha. We had contracts with people we could sell to.

During that time Gary became the tomato capital of East Texas along with Jacksonville. We started shipping green tomatoes out of Carthage by carload lots. In 1941 we shipped 36 freight cars, more than any other shipper in East Texas. Most of the tomatoes went north. "Green pulled" tomatoes were picked while green. They took them to what was called a "tomato shed" like in Gary. They sized there with a grading machine, then put in bins. The ladies or girls of the town packed them, 36 to a row and with three rows, meant over 100 tomatoes in each lug. Then a top was put on and they were put in the freight cars with ice placed at the ends of the cars. They ripened while on their way to their destination. We also handled quite a few strawberries. We were generally trying to make a living.

I had no idea the war was coming. We were all busy working and thought nothing of war. My wife was a school teacher then, and didn't make much money. We were trying to buy a home. But she bought me a 16 gauge shotgun as I liked to bird hunt. It was a Browning automatic. It was to be a Christmas present. I bird hunted all over the country. I liked to quail hunt.

In May, 1942, I got a notice from the draft board that I was going to be drafted. At that time you had a choice. You could enlist to get in the branch you wanted also. Several men my age or older had already been called up. They had no children, and we didn't either at that time. So my brother and I , and Clifford Smith, and a fellow named Monty who worked for United Gas (I can't remember his last name) decided to join the Air Corps. We were all married. We got Mr. Q.M. Martin to give us a little refresher course. He came to our home and gave us ten days of the things he thought we might be tested on. We wanted to go into the Aviation Cadet program. We took this little course from him which he did for gratis. He was glad to help. We all went to Barksdale and all of us passed the mental test. Then we went back over to take the physical, and I failed that by being color blind. I never knew it before. So they turned me down. When they turned me down I came back home and reported to my draft board. The other boys all passed.

We were shipping tomatoes down at the depot and I got my draft notice in the mail. I was to report in July to be inducted. A good friend at the time taught school, Sybil Duran. Her husband's name was Warren and he was working in the drug store. We decided we would enlist in the Army Air Corps. So we went to Shreveport with our wives and we enlisted. That was in July, 1942. The draft board, in June, had given me until the end of the tomato season (about July 12) to decide what I was to do. But anyway, we went and volunteered.

The next week E.B. Morrison was coaching the Carthage High School baseball team at the state championship in Dallas. So we went to see them play. Their best player was a pitcher, Jim Reeves. He pitched that day but Carthage lost. That was on a Saturday. We came back home, and on the following Monday we went to Shreveport to report in at Camp Beauregard. That was on July 22, 1942. After several days there Warren was shipped out to Mineral Wells, Texas. Because of his experience in the drug store they made him a medic. I'd had enough experience operating things so they sent me to Clearwater, Florida, for basic training. I stayed there from July 25, to September 1st. Then I was shipped to Enid, Oklahoma. We finished our training there. Then we were shipped to Pendleton Field in Oregon in December. It was pretty cold up there. We trained there in servicing and supplying airplane squadrons. The final phase of training was a Sioux City, Iowa.

We got ready to go overseas in August, 1943 and went to Newark, New Jersey. We left the United States on a Troop ship with a little over 5,000 on board. We had to sleep in shifts in swinging hammocks. Where I was supposed to sleep was five decks below the water line. I managed to stay upstairs on deck. It was too hot for one thing down below. Going over I believe there were 27 ships in the convoy. We had one submarine attack and lost a ship. The ship changed course every seven minutes because they said it would take a sub that long to line you up in its sights. So we followed a zig - zag course. We were on the way from August 21 to when we landed in Africa on September 6. We had one airplane and one sub attack on the way over. We lost several men when a plane strafed the ship.

We landed in North Africa. We had to wait while the ship unloaded. The port was filled with ships and on the second night there was an air raid. It was a frightering time. I was fortunate. We then left Africa and went into Italy and then to the island of Sardinia. We later moved on to Naples, Italy about Thanksgiving or Christmas 1943. We spent the night at the University of Naples. It had been a nice building but had been bombed. It was cold and snowing and we built a big fire on the tile floors. Of course, the MP's came along and made us put out the fire, but we'd build another one as soon as they left. We just wanted to stay warm with the walls blown out and all. I spent several miserable nights there.

We finally caught up with the 1st Fighter Group who we were attached to. We were supposed to keep their airplanes flying and support them as needed. We caught up with them outside of Naples. They were flying P - 38 airplanes doing low level bombing missions. They were trying to clear out a path to northern Italy. They were flying escort duty for our bombers as they were going into Germany. They'd escort them as far as they could go. They escorted the bombers going out of Italy, but also those from England. They were trying to protect our bombers from the German fighters. The Germans had a lot of firepower to face.

I was the chief clerk in the office for my group. I kept up with the personnel. We were called the 94th Air Service Squadron. We were with the 1st Fighter Group in the 15th Air Force. I was a staff sergeant. We had a fair amount of free time. It was like a regular job with office hours. We had a major as commanding officer, a captain over the engineering department who had charge of work on the airplanes. Under him he had two first lieutenants and two warrants, and a medical doctor, a captain. He was a pediatrician but took care of us. The problem over there, common to all Army installations, was they used a lot of grease in cooking. That led to things like hepatitis and yellow jaundice, which came from a none too healthful diet. None of us starved to death on that diet, many got fat.

While I was in Italy I found out where E.B. Morrison of Carthage was stationed. I had a jeep at my disposal and I went to see him. This was after my brother Buddy got killed. He was a pilot flying out of England. I went to visit Carol Click, who was a lieutenant, who married my sister later. They met at S.M.U. He was flying B - 25's. He found out where I was and flew down to my base. I went to visit with him several days. While I was with him I went on a mission, a low level mission over Cassino. You could see the people on the ground and everything else. You could see both sides. I shouldn't have gone. When I got back I found a letter I had sent my brother. It had come back marked "Deceased." I didn't write to my parents or my wife because I figured I'd gotten the news first. So I waited for them to write and tell me. But after that I visited E.B. Morrison. He was the intelligence officer for a bomb group. I went to a briefing or two with him. When the men were going on a mission, he'd brief them on where the bombers would meet anti - aircraft fire or German fighters. Our intelligence was very good. I went to see him a couple of times. In his group was a boy I used to play football with, Jimmy Duran, 16 who was the brother of Warren who I'd enlisted with. Jimmy was a tail gunner with this B - 24 group. He wasn't in E.B.'s squadron but was in the same group. Another gunner from Carthage was "Skeezek" Rowden. I met him there too.

I was impressed with the P - 38 pilots we supported. They were 21 - 22 years old boys who didn't know the meaning of fear. I saw one come back and land with half the smoke stack from a train hanging on its wing. I don't know how some of them got back. They were one seater fighter planes and were fast. They carried guns and bombs. Some came back so shot up you wondered how they did it. We lost a lot of pilots though, and a lot of planes. I was in Australia last year and met a man who had been in the 1st Fighter Group. He sent me a list of their losses during their tour overseas. Most of those pilots were in their early twenties.

I came back home. I left Italy November 11, 1945 and landed in Norfolk, Virginia on November 27. I came home on a Liberty ship. It took sixteen days. They were flying a lot of people home but they didn't have enough planes to fly us all. I was discharged under the point system. You earned points by time overseas and other reasons such as campaigns and battle stars. We got every battle star the 1st Fighter Group did as we were attached to them.

They shipped me then to Camp Fannin, Texas. I'd never heard of it. They said it was at Tyler, Texas. So I got there by train. I got discharged December 30, 1945. I was glad to get my career with the Army over with.

I went back into the cotton ginning business with my father. We operated a cotton gin in Panola County until 1964. Then oil and gas took over, plus cattle, and cotton growing ceased. I had some trucks and hauled a lot of livestock. In the meantime, after I got back from the Service, my wife and I had two boys. We sent them both to college, and one is an

1. J.R. Underwood - 1942

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attorney here and the other teaches at Kilgore Jr. College. The last twelve years I worked it was for an engineering company out of Monroe, Louisiana. Since my wife and I retired we've been enjoying ourselves and doing a lot of travel.

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